



1985

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DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

REPORT OF INVESTIGATIONS NO. 67

1985

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE MT. PLEASANT MUNICIPAL
AIRPORT EXPANSION PROJECT, MT. PLEASANT, MICHIGAN

William M. Cremin

Prepared for:

City of Mt. Pleasant
Department of Public Works
Mt. Pleasant, Michigan 48858

INTRODUCTION:

Upon receipt of a letter and purchase order from Mr. Duane Ellis, P.E., Director of the Department of Public Works, City of Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, authorizing a Phase I archaeological site location survey of the Mt. Pleasant Municipal Airport Expansion Project, surveyors from the Department of Anthropology, Western Michigan University undertook on-site evaluation in order to determine if a planned extension of the airport runway into Section 7 of Chippewa Township would have an impact on potentially significant archaeological resources. There follows a report of fieldwork conducted on 13-14 Apr 85, together with appropriate background information and recommendations based upon the findings of the survey party.

PROJECT PERSONNEL:

Principal Investigator - William M. Cremin, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Anthropology, WMU
Field Assistant - David G. De Fant, M.A. Candidate in Anthropology, WMU

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT AREA:

Although the original area to be surveyed aggregated 237 acres (96 ha) in the NW 1/4 and W 1/2, NE 1/4 of Section 7, modifications in the scope of work reflecting alterations in the land purchase for this project ultimately required that surveyors examine only that land presently owned by the City of Mt. Pleasant and totaling approximately 77 acres (31.2 ha) in

the W 1/2, NW 1/4 of Section 7, Chippewa Township, T14N R3W, Isabella County, Michigan (Map 1). In addition, the survey team was asked, if possible, on the basis of its thorough examination of the property owned by the City, to make a determination for five acres of land adjoining the City's parcel to which we would not be granted access because it still remained in private ownership. For reasons cited later in this report, we have had no difficulty complying with this request.

The study area is located immediately E and NE of the

present airport runway which occupies most of Section 12 in

Union Township. This is an upland area flanking the meandering

course of the Chippewa River which forms the northern and north-

eastern boundaries of the project. Mean elevation ASL is 750 ft

(225 m) across the center of the project, with the terrain

sloping ever so gently toward the river.

Soils occupying the project area are formed in loamy and

sandy glaciofluvial deposits. They range from deep, well drained

sands in that area of the project currently occupied by a com-

mmercial stand of red and white pines, to very poorly drained

soils that are subject to ponding. The latter condition is

most evident in the center of the S 1/2 of the project, where

a wet marsh surrounded by meadows occurs. In fact, standing

water and/or thoroughly saturated soils everywhere hindered

surveyor progress at the time of fieldwork.

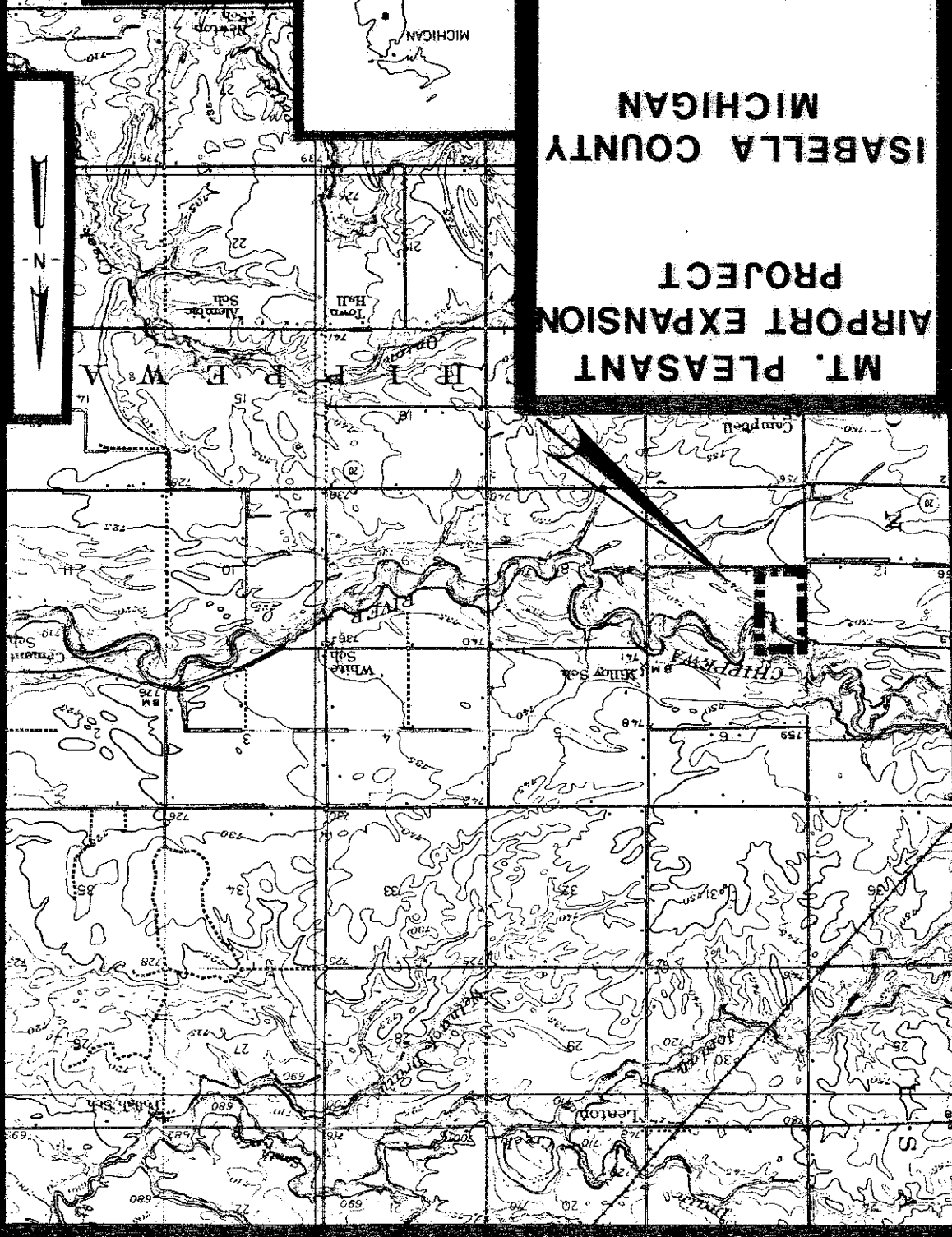
At the time of our visit, the study area supported a mixed

MAP 1
ISABELLA COUNTY
MICHIGAN
AIRPORT EXPANSION
PROJECT
MT. PLEASANT

QUADRANGLE LOCATION



Km



vegetative cover. The S 1/2 was dominated by the aforementioned wet marsh, supporting a dense cover of sedges, reeds, marsh grasses, bulrushes, and water tolerant shrubby species. Around the marsh there occurred a lush meadow, with dense grass cover broken only by an occasional tree or shrub of inconsequential size and several areas of brambles and weedy annuals that have taken over where furrows remain from an area farmer's abortive attempt to turn and plant the land surrounding the marsh several years ago.

The N 1/2 of the project, except in the area along the river at the northern end of the parcel where the bluff top was grass-covered, supported often dense stands of trees consisting mainly of the managed pine plantation. The stand of pines was flanked on the south by a scrubby stand of second growth timber, including red maple, silver maple, American elm, quaking aspen, and paper birch. Virginia creeper and poison ivy were observed throughout. To the west of the pines were observed ponded areas supporting brambles and noxious weeds. Between the pine plantation and the river on the east there occurred a high bank supporting principally paper birch, but with some scattered maples, elms, aspen, and an occasional scrub oak.

Visual examination of the riverbank revealed that bluffs ranged from two to 9 m in height, with an inundated floodplain intervening between the river channel and the bluffs on the north end of the project and a very steep drop from the bluffs to river's edge along the NE boundary. The high ground flanking

the river, with several areas of more sloping terrain providing easy access to the water, seemed to us especially attractive for at least brief occupation (i.e. camping) in the past.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH:

A literature, documents, and state site file search revealed that no archaeological sites had ever been reported to occur in the general vicinity of the project area. Of 31 sites recorded in Isabella County, there is an historic mill site (201B26) reportedly located on the river about three km downstream from the project in Section 9 (Ms. Barbara Mead, personal communication), and W.B. Hinsdale's (1931)

Archaeological Atlas of Michigan shows a village site to have stood where the northeast corner of the City of Mt. Pleasant is located today. This site lies in Union Township about two km west of the project area.

About one decade ago, some survey work was undertaken on the adjacent airport property in Section 12 of Union Township. In response to a decision to expand airport facilities, Dr. Karen L. Mohr Chavez of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Central Michigan University conducted a Phase I assessment for the City of Mt. Pleasant. In two reports (Chavez 1975; 1976), this investigator described a program of research involving machine stripping of seven parallel transects, ranging in length from 60-307 m and 2.3 m wide, followed by intensive surface scanning and the excavation of three small test pits to depths of 65-70 cm in the area of the existing runway and its adjoining aprons. Observing

nothing of potential significance, Chavez concluded that the

some surface visibility in areas where vehicle tracks had reduced along each transect. Moreover, along the bluffs we did observe 10 m or less and shovel tests were placed at intervals of 5-10 m of the bluffs the distance between transects was reduced to with the exception being that as we approached to within 50 m The N 1/2 was initially evaluated in the same manner,

potential significance;

cultural material --let alone an archaeological site of to acquire from the landowner in question will produce any that the 120 X 150 m parcel that the City of Mt. Pleasant plans within view of the property line, it is regarded as most unlikely nothing of consequence on the surface of the cornfield lying of the meadow surrounding the marsh, and seeing absolutely of cultural material despite systematic and intensive probing property. In light of our failure to make a single observation were still in private ownership, without actually leaving city scanned the cornfield occupying the adjacent five acres that At the property line delimiting the study area on the E, we loci spaced at intervals of 20-25 m along each line of survey. traversed along transects spaced 20 m apart, with shovel test S-1/2 of the project, the area about the marsh was systematically procedures to conduct this investigation. Commencing in the was generally nil, the survey team employed shovel testing Inasmuch as ground surface visibility across the parcel

FIELD PROCEDURES:

no threat to archaeological resources. expansion of airport facilities in Section 12 posed absolutely

Review of the available literature, documents, and site files in the Bureau of History, Michigan Department of State

been completed to perform a systematic assessment.

return to the project area after the purchase of this land has

of this small parcel, make it seem totally inappropriate to observations, while not actually reflecting on-ground examination

potentially significant material remains. Certainly, our

was not accessible to us at the time of our visit, will yield

complete the runway expansion project at the airport, but which

very doubtful that the five acre parcel that will be needed to

made in the project area. By implication, it is also thought

observation of potentially significant cultural material being

Fieldwork conducted on 13-14 Apr 85 resulted in not a single

RESULTS OF THE PHASE I SURVEY:

the presence of potentially significant cultural material.

sance, provided ample opportunity to examine the project for

the aforementioned opportunities for limited surface reconnais-

locations are shown on Map 2. These shovel tests, together with

40-70 cm, were placed across the project area. Their approximate

In aggregate, 640 shovel tests, ranging in depth from

to supplement our shovel testing program.

the application of surface reconnaissance procedures with which

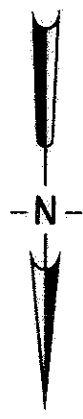
the bluffs, afforded limited but importance opportunities for

visibility, together with raw areas on the floodplain below

vegetation on the ground. These instances of greater surface

the ground cover or the canopy layer had resulted in sparse

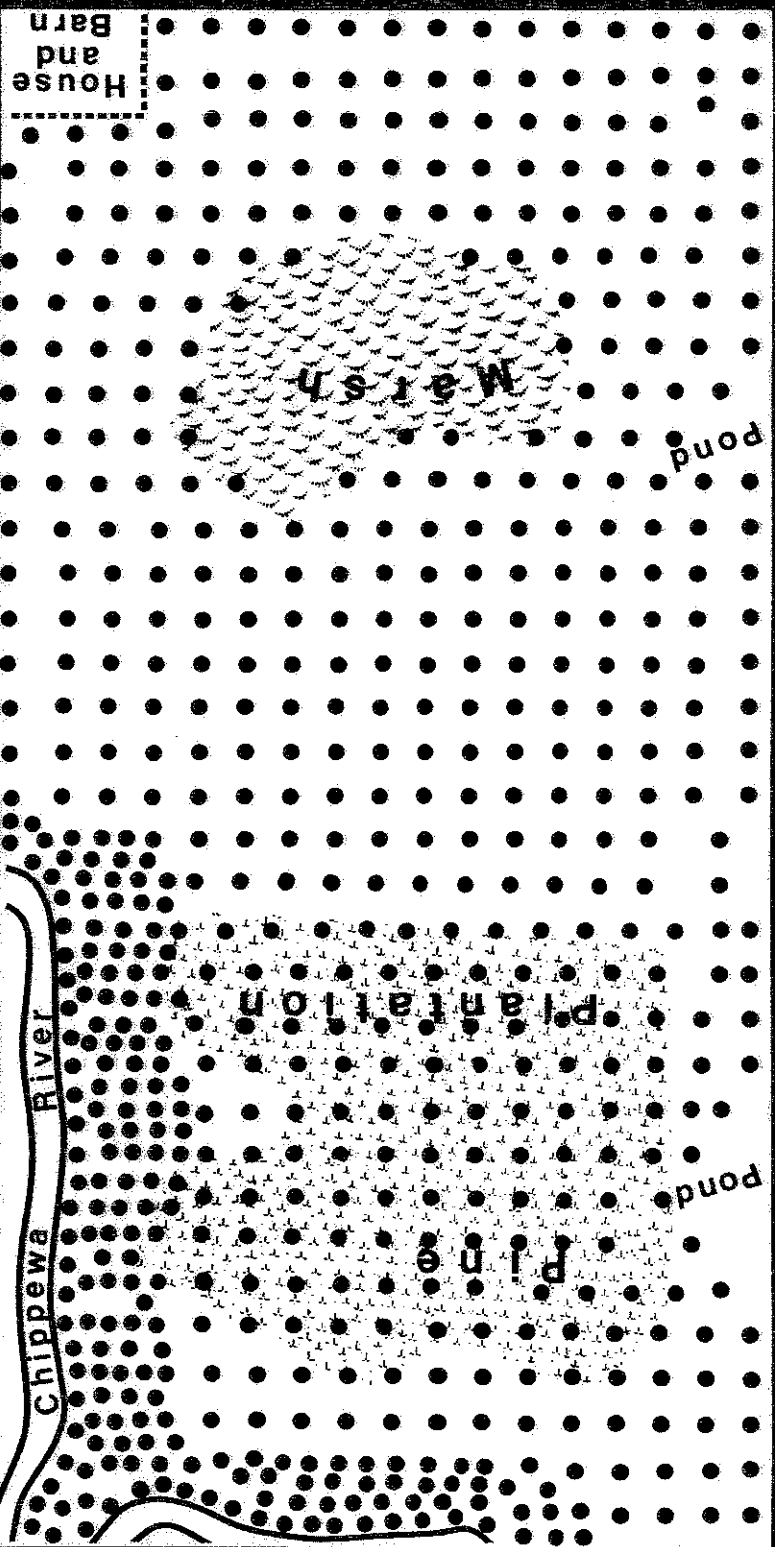
MAP 2



100 m

● 30 shovel test

MT. PLEASANT
AIRPORT
EXPANSION
PROJECT



revealed that no sites had been recorded for the project area. Furthermore, archaeological fieldwork on the adjoining property in Section 12 of Union Township by a qualified professional has also failed to recover any information shedding light on past human utilization of this segment of the Chippewa River Valley. In the total absence of any information having a bearing on prior human occupation of the project area, it is recommended that the expansion of the Mt. Pleasant Municipal Airport runway into the W 1/2, NW 1/4 of Section 7 of Chippewa Township will not have an adverse impact on archaeological sites and should be permitted to proceed as scheduled.

REFERENCES CITED:

- Chavez, K.L.M. 1975 Letter report to Mr. Denis L. Richards, Williams and Works, Inc., Grand Rapids, Michigan. Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Central Michigan University. Mt. Pleasant.
- 1976 Report of the supplemental archaeological survey at the Mt. Pleasant Municipal Airport. Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Central Michigan University. Mt. Pleasant.
- Hinsdale, W.B. 1931 Archaeological atlas of Michigan. University of Michigan Handbook Series 4. Ann Arbor.