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# 75-Archaeological Survey of the Sumitec Corporation Expansion Project, City of Benton Harbor, Michigan (ER 9289)

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DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY  
WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

REPORT OF INVESTIGATIONS NO. 75

1986

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE SUMITEC CORPORATION EXPANSION PROJECT,  
CITY OF BENTON HARBOR, MICHIGAN

(ER 9289)

William M. Cremin

A Report of Research  
Conducted on Behalf of:

Mr. Michael R. Prochaska  
M.R. Prochaska, Inc.  
1400 Linwood  
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48103

for:

City of Benton Harbor, Michigan

**INTRODUCTION:**

At the request of Ms. Joy Bauer, Consultant, and Mr. Michael R. Prochaska, President, M.R. Prochaska, Inc., acting for the City of Benton Harbor, Michigan, the project Principal Investigator, Dr. William M. Cremin, planned and initiated on-site evaluation of a parcel of land fronting on Paw Paw Avenue and intended for expansion of Sumitec Corporation facilities. There follows a report of fieldwork conducted on 20 Nov 86, together with appropriate background information and recommendations based upon our findings.

**PROJECT PERSONNEL:**

Principal Investigator - Dr. William M. Cremin, Associate Professor  
of Anthropology, Western Michigan University  
Field Supervisor - Mr. David G. De Fant, M.A., WMU  
Field Assistant - Mr. Dale W. Quattrin, Graduate Student in  
Anthropology, WMU

**DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT AREA:**

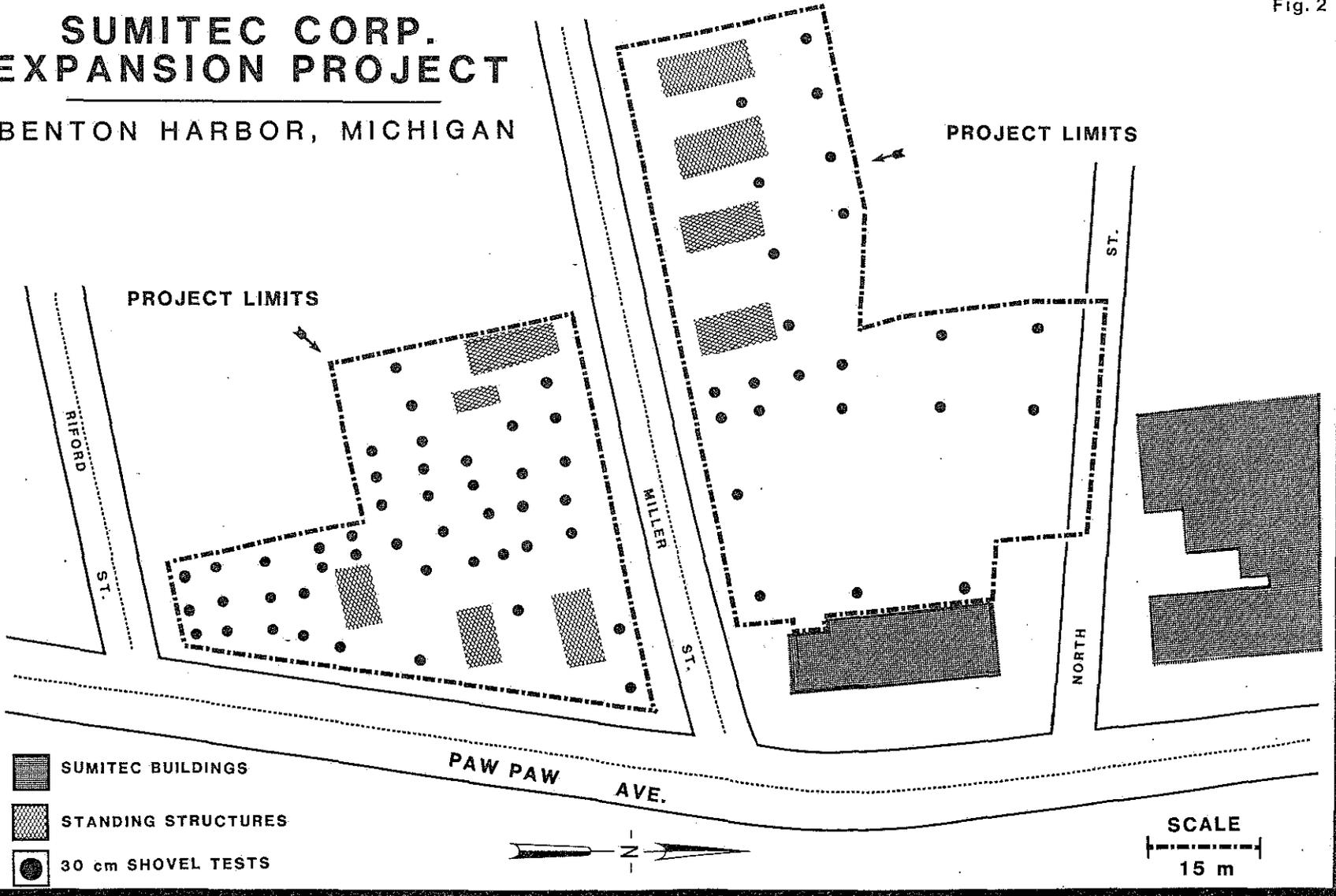
The research area of this study is a 1.5 acre (0.6 ha) parcel of land located in the center, NE 1/4, NE 1/4, SW 1/4 of Section 18, Benton Township, T4S R18W, Berrien County, Michigan. It lies within the corporate limits of the City of Benton Harbor. The project lies immediately west of Paw Paw Avenue, and is bordered on the north by North Street and on the south by Riford Street. Miller Street lies intermediate between the two and divides the project area into approximately equal parts. Figures 1 and 2 show the location of the project in the city and the general



Fig. 2

# SUMITEC CORP. EXPANSION PROJECT

BENTON HARBOR, MICHIGAN



configuration and current condition of the study area as observed by the survey team.

The project is today an area in transition. The substantial homes of prosperous 19th century city residents are long gone; and the 20th century neighborhood noted for its Italian ethnicity now shows only decay. In their place is an expanding industrial complex, representing the hope of this city for revitalizing, at least in part, the local economy.

It was not always this way. When Americans first established themselves in western Benton Township, the undulating uplands supported dense hardwood forests dominated by the beech and sugar maples, but with white oak, red oak, whitewood, black walnut, elm, ash, basswood, and various hickories being common throughout. The project area, located on bluff's edge at an elevation of 180 m ASL, looked out over the "swampy flats" bordering the Paw Paw River as it flowed by at a distance of about 500 m to the north and west to join the St. Joseph River just above its mouth at Lake Michigan (Coolidge 1906: 1-3).

The project area lies in the 190 acre claim of Eleazer Morton, who in 1836 became the first permanent resident of western Benton Township to settle on the south side of the Paw Paw River. This land holding, passed on to his son, Henry C. Morton, proved to be critical in the city's history when, in 1860, a portion of the land just east of Ox Creek was "used" to bring the Benton Harbor Ship Canal to fruition. Shortly thereafter, Benton Harbor was platted; incorporation followed in 1869 (Ellis 1880: 189-190).

#### PREVIOUS RESEARCH:

Examination of the literature, documents, and state site files

maintained by the Bureau of History, Michigan Department of State, revealed that no archaeological sites had ever been recorded for the area of the project. Nor are any sites recorded for the immediate vicinity. Be that as it may, the location of the project on bluff's edge overlooking the floodplain of the Paw Paw River can be regarded as having high site potential--that is, should any archaeological context be preserved in this area of intensive urban development!

#### **SURVEY FIELD PROCEDURES:**

Although contacted and requested to perform this Phase I survey in late September, difficulties relating to the execution of a contract delayed performance of the fieldwork until 20 Nov 86. Fortunately, a break in the weather provided the field team with an opportunity to evaluate the project prior to the onset of winter.

Ground surface visibility across the project was such that the opportunity for surface reconnaissance was minimal at best. Therefore, surveyors relied on shovel testing procedures, with occasional examination of excavations established by construction crews working in the area, to evaluate subsurface deposits. Initially, surveyors established transects (lines of survey) at intervals of ca. 10 m, with shovel tests being placed along transects every 10 m. However, after having initiated systematic recovery procedures in the southern portion of the project, only to find that dramatic subsurface disturbance was everywhere in evidence, shovel testing became more sporadic as surveyors very deliberately sought out, but did not find, areas within the project where recent disturbance might be minimized. To the contrary, shovel testing to depths of 60-80 cm below the ground surface, and examination of excavations revealing even deeper

soil profiles, consistently revealed evidence to suggest that recent filling and leveling of the ground between structures, and the removal of structures, themselves, in all likelihood had destroyed any archaeological context that might have existed within the limits of the project.

Figure 2 shows the extent of our application of shovel testing procedures, with the remainder of the project simply not warranting the excavation of shovel tests on the basis of strong surface evidence of considerable prior disturbance reaching to depths of at least 40 cm below the modern surface of the ground!

#### **RESULTS OF THE SURVEY:**

On-site examination of the project area by a team of experienced surveyors has revealed that the entire area has been significantly impacted in recent times. Across the property we did not observe a single undisturbed soil profile. Following establishment of a program of systematic and intensive shovel testing procedures, the field party quickly realized the futility of this strategy, opting rather for the examination of extant excavations in this construction zone and the search for areas where surface indications might suggest some promise of context if probing with shovels were undertaken. Needless to say, they observed no such areas of possible promise and elected to cease their examination of the project area.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS DERIVED FROM THE PHASE I SURVEY:**

Based upon a careful on-site examination of the project area, resulting only in the recovery of information confirming that it has been massively impacted by recent land leveling and filling, it is our considered opinion that proposed construction activities

will not have an adverse impact on archaeological resources. It is therefore recommended that the project proposed by the City of Benton Harbor, Michigan for the area under study be permitted to proceed as planned.

**REFERENCES CITED:**

Coolidge, O.W.

1906 A twentieth century history of Berrien county, Michigan.  
Lewis Publishing Company, Chicago.

Ellis, F.

1880 History of Berrien and Van Buren counties, Michigan.  
D.W. Ensign and Company, Philadelphia.