Historic-era domestic refuse deposits are a commonly encountered resource type but do not always yield important information through archaeological data alone. Historical records can enhance and complement archaeological data. In 2013-2014, 25 historic-period refuse deposit features were documented during construction monitoring in downtown Los Angeles. The features were associated with a brief period of residential development between the 1880s and 1920s. Review of historical materials helped to identify and interpret the nature and duration of occupation and the demography, socioeconomic status, and cultural background of the people associated with the features.

Domestic refuse deposits are a frequently encountered type of historic-era archaeological feature, particularly in an environment such as downtown Los Angeles, which has been occupied by Euro-Americans since the late eighteenth century. In particular, such features are common in areas inhabited prior to the advent of municipal garbage collection in the late nineteenth century, when residents would often dispose of garbage in pits or as sheet refuse on their properties.

In 2013-2014, 25 refuse deposit features were recorded during the course of construction monitoring in downtown Los Angeles in advance of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) La Kretz Innovation Campus project. The archaeological features were recorded as a single site under the trinomial CA-LAN-4460H. The site is located within the Arts District of Downtown Los Angeles and encompasses a 3.16-acre city block, surrounded by Palmetto Street on the south, Colyton Street on the west, Fifth Street on the north, and Hewitt Street (historically Carolina Street) on the east (Figure 1).

The artifacts recovered from the refuse deposit features broadly dated the site to the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries; however, the artifacts themselves revealed little about the people who discarded them or the historical character of the residential block. By augmenting the archaeological data with historical documentation, it was possible to shed light on the demography, socioeconomic status, and cultural background of the features’ creators, which in turn resulted in a more accurate and well-supported evaluation of the site’s significance.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Los Angeles: 1880-1920

Founded in 1781, Los Angeles remained a relatively small and unimportant town through the 1870s, when its population numbered about 5,000. However, a significant period of growth began after the city was connected to the transcontinental railroad: first the Southern Pacific Railroad in 1876, and then the Santa Fe Railroad in 1885 (Mullaly and Petty 2002; Orsi 2005). The resulting rail fare wars led to an unprecedented real estate boom, as well as affordable cross-country fares. Low rail fares and the promise of a better life enticed immigrants from other parts of the United States and the world to Los Angeles. Settlers flooded into the region, and the demand for real estate skyrocketed. As real estate prices soared, land that had been farmed for decades outlived its agricultural value and was sold to become residential communities (McWilliams 1946).

The population of Los Angeles increased 350 percent in the period between 1880 and 1890 (Dinkelspiel 2008). In the following decades, the city continued to grow exponentially. Between 1890 and
1930, the population of Los Angeles increased from 50,000 to 1.2 million people (Wild 2005). Many of those who moved to Los Angeles during this period were non-white Americans or foreign-born, who made up about 30 percent of Los Angeles’s population by 1930 (Wild 2005).

**History of LAN-4460H**

Early maps indicate that prior to the boom of the 1880s, the area east of the city center and west of the Los Angeles River, including the site location, was entirely devoted to agriculture, primarily vineyards (Ord et al. 1857). The site location was within a block of land owned at that time by O. H. Bliss (Stephenson 1884).

O. H. Bliss had arrived in Los Angeles in 1874 and purchased “the old Rowland homestead property … opposite the Wolfskill place” (Los Angeles Herald 1874a). Bliss paid $18,000 for the property, which was described as containing

- thirty-five acres on which is one of the most elegant residences in the city, one hundred orange trees … a large number of English walnut trees … many lime and lemon trees, twenty-one acres of fine old grape vines and a great many apple, peach, and pear trees … the soil is splendid and one of the zanjas [irrigation ditches] runs through the center of the grounds [Los Angeles Herald 1874b].

As in other areas just outside the city center, the population boom of the 1880s led to a swift change in land use from agricultural to residential, and Bliss’s land was quickly developed. In December 1886, an advertisement was placed in the *Los Angeles Herald* for the auction and sale of the Bliss Tract, comprising “121 Building lots; also, large, two-story house, barns, outbuildings, etc., etc.” (Los Angeles Herald 1886). The site comprised Block F of F. P. Howard and Company’s Subdivision of the Bliss Tract.
Sanborn fire insurance maps indicate that single-family houses were built on the lots of Block F by 1894 (the first year that the Sanborn maps depict the site area), and by 1906, 22 single-family homes were present, along with the Sunset Telegraph and Telephone Company Supply Depot at the corner of Palmetto and Colyton Streets (Sanborn Map Company 1894, 1906).

Although residential development was booming, by the turn of the twentieth century the area was becoming a center of industrial production and transportation as well. A bird’s-eye map of Los Angeles published in 1909 shows a patchwork of residences, train tracks and train stations, and manufacturers such as the Italian Vineyard Company, Pioneer Boiler and Machine Company, Merchants Ice and Cold Storage, F. O. Engstrom Company Contractors, National Vinegar and Pickle Company, Kahn Beck Cannery, L. W. Blinn Lumber Company, Thoro Soap Company, Union Oil Company, and Barker Brothers Furniture (Figure 2; Birdseye View Publishing Company 1909). Railroad tracks snaked through the neighborhood, which lay between the Southern Pacific Railroad depot (La Grande Depot) and the Santa Fe Railroad depot (Arcade Depot, and later Central Station) (Baist 1921).

The balance of residential and industrial uses in the area tipped in favor of industry beginning in the 1910s, when the City Council established an industrial district between Main Street and the river (Wild 2005). Throughout the next few decades, zoning changes encouraged industrial development while at the same time discouraging residential development and upkeep. Around 1923, most of the residences located within the site boundaries were razed, and warehouses for the Barker Brothers Furniture Company were constructed (Los Angeles County Assessor 2014). Some houses in the northern portion of the block were left standing until the early 1950s (Figure 3).
Figure 3. Undated photograph of a house located within the site, likely taken from Colyton Street (Louis Clyde Stoumen, photographer, Housing Authority Collection, Los Angeles Public Library).

Cultural and Ethnic Diversity in a Working-class Neighborhood

Early-twentieth-century sources written about the areas to the south and east of Los Angeles’s center paint a picture of ethnically diverse working-class neighborhoods and frequently of difficult living conditions. A 1909 article on district nursing in Los Angeles described the city’s Seventh Ward, which included the site:

Passing through a manufacturing section of the city, by iron foundries, packing-houses and railroad yards at Mateo and Willow streets, we enter a region of small cottages, some of them occupied by well-to-do Americans. Here the Mexicans are few, but on reaching the southern end of the ward we find a colony of 800 Italians. On Santa Fe Avenue there is a large population of negroes. It is estimated that there are 5,000 negroes in and about this neighborhood, which is called “South Africa” [Weston 1909:215].

A 1919 report by the Commission of Immigration and Housing described the area between Main Street on the west, Alhambra Road on the north, the Los Angeles River on the east, and Sixth Street on the south:
This is the most cosmopolitan district of Los Angeles. There are very few Americans.... All the evils of a foreign quarter characterize this part of the city. It includes Chinatown with the usual vices of that nationality. It includes the largest Japanese colony, and everywhere there is bad housing, frightful overcrowding, congestion of peoples in houses and of houses on lots. Nothing except the social agencies including the schools, bring any American influence to this neighborhood. Except for them, we show these people Americanization at its very worst [Commission of Immigration and Housing of California 1919:15].

Many residents of the Seventh Ward were Italian and Mexican immigrants. At the turn of the twentieth century, around 1,000 Italians lived in Los Angeles. By 1917, that number had grown to 10,000 (Lothrop 2003). In 1900, Italian populations were concentrated in the vicinity of the Plaza and Sonoratown (the foothills of Elysian Park), and to a lesser extent in the Sixth and Seventh Wards (Crosby 1993; Italian American Museum of Los Angeles 2014). Closer to the site, a small enclave of Italians from northern Italy existed on Hewitt Street (Bitetti 2007; Gatto 2009).

The Mexican population of Los Angeles, while a vital part of Los Angeles’s population since the founding of the city, grew dramatically after the start of the Mexican Revolution in 1910, from 5,611 in that year to an estimated 35,000-40,000 by 1915 (Lewthwaite 2009). Many Mexican immigrants crossed the border as a result of the revolution; at the same time, reliance on Mexican labor was increasing in the Southwest. The Mexican population was dispersed throughout various multiethnic neighborhoods within the city, particularly east of the Los Angeles River.

In addition to immigrant populations, the site vicinity also housed many African-American families. African-Americans began to come to Los Angeles in the mid-nineteenth century, many fleeing slavery or seeking economic opportunity. The African-American population of Los Angeles was relatively small in the early twentieth century, comprising no more than 3 percent of the population of the city prior to 1930 (Grimes 2008). Originally centered on Spring Street in the central city, the African-American community gradually moved south and east to Central Avenue between Eighth and Twentieth Streets in the 1910s (Grimes 2008).

**THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA**

The archaeological features and isolated artifacts documented during monitoring were recorded as a single archaeological site, which was assigned the trinomial LAN-4460H. Twenty-five of the features identified during monitoring contained residential refuse, primarily consumer products disposed of in pits at the back of the residential lots. In general, because the construction activities that were monitored consisted primarily of trenching for utility lines and foundation extensions, refuse deposits were encountered when a backhoe or excavator cut through a portion of the deposit, leaving part of the feature visible in the trench wall. Artifacts that had been disturbed were documented and collected as appropriate, and the portion of the feature visible in the trench wall was measured and photographed. Undisturbed portions of the features were not further investigated, unless planned construction activities would cause further disturbance.

Recovered artifacts were sorted and classified by material type, such as glass, ceramics, etc., and activity group, which categorizes the function of an artifact. Artifacts that were identified as diagnostic, such as whole bottles, ceramics, or glass containing identifiable markings, were cataloged, as were artifacts determined to be unique or representative. Analyses performed on the artifact collection included dating all temporally diagnostic objects, calculating the minimum number of individual items (MNI) represented by complete and fragmentary objects with known function (mainly glass bottles, glassware, and ceramics), and determining the product associated with the artifacts, where relevant. Data collected for diagnostic artifacts included information such as manufacturing technology, embossing, product information, and background information pertaining to manufacturer, product, or contents types. Based on
an assessment of the above characteristics, artifacts were assigned date ranges when possible. Seventeen of the features contained diagnostic artifacts.

A total MNI of 193 artifacts were collected. The overall date range of all artifacts was between 1796 and 1962; however, the vast majority of the artifacts date to the period between the 1880s and 1920s, which corresponds to the period during which the site was made up of single-family residences (Figure 4). The earliest date in the artifact date range, 1796, derives from a piece of Chinese porcelain that was decorated with a Four Season decorative motif, which was used as early as 1796 but which was common on Chinese ceramics throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Choy 2014). No artifacts could be definitively linked to earlier use of the site, while a relatively small number of artifacts date to the Barker Brothers warehouse era (post 1923). Materials recovered, in order of abundance, were glass, ceramic, bone, metal, leather, shell, plastic, wood, and rubber.

Of the 193 artifacts recovered during archaeological monitoring, the majority of the assemblage (n = 102; 53 percent) consisted of consumer goods (Figure 5). The most common type of consumer goods was containers for food-related products such as salad oils, condiments, and spices. Beverage bottles were also heavily represented, including alcohol, soda, mineral water, and milk bottles. The remaining consumer goods consisted of medicine or cod-liver oil bottles, cosmetic items such as cold cream or ointment, or household items such as shoe polish or ink.

Kitchen items comprised the second largest portion of the assemblage (n = 62; 32 percent). This category mostly consisted of ceramic tableware or crockery, but also included metal pots and kettles, glass tableware, and butchered bone. Artifacts associated with the remaining seven activity groups (industrial, household, livery, unique items, personal items, tools, and garment) occurred far less frequently and, combined, totaled only 15 percent (n = 29) of the assemblage. Industrial items and tools included construction hardware, a bicycle pedal, and mason’s and carpenter’s tools. Garments included leather shoe fragments and buttons. Personal and household items included porcelain figurines, a darning...
The majority of the assemblage consisted of residential refuse, primarily consumer products, disposed of on-site. The artifacts likely arrived in their discovery locations through primary deposition (i.e., the burying of trash) or through secondary deposition, which may have occurred during historic modifications to the site, such as the construction of the Barker Brothers warehouse complex. Some industrial or construction debris, such as wood and metal fragments and nails, was identified; however, it was not possible to determine whether this material was associated with the demolished residences or with the Barker Brothers warehouse complex.

By looking at the feature locations plotted on historic Sanborn maps, it was apparent that nearly all of the refuse deposit features were located either in the back of a historic residential lot or adjacent to a house. This corresponds with the likely locations of domestic refuse disposal. Although municipal trash collection was available during this time period, contemporary newspapers report that it was unreliable, and that it was common for residents to dispose of their garbage in a convenient location on or near their
Figure 6. Locally produced consumer goods, LAN-4460H.
property (Los Angeles Herald 1903, 1907). It is possible that some of the refuse deposit features may in fact represent the location of privies, although direct evidence of this was not identified. Connection to the city sewer system was not made until after 1895 for Colyton Street and after 1899 for Carolina (Hewitt) Street, meaning that a house constructed before then would have had a privy on the property, most likely behind the house at the back of the lot (Los Angeles Herald 1895, 1899). Once the sewers had been installed and the privies were no longer needed, the privy pit would have been a convenient place for trash disposal. Stratigraphy was clearly evident in only two of the features (10 and 11), but the date ranges for the artifacts in most features suggest multiple episodes of deposition and repeated use of the disposal locations.

HISTORIC RECORDS REVEAL CHANGES OVER TIME

Site-specific archival research was conducted in order to place LAN-4460H within the appropriate historic context; to identify the site’s period of significance; and to identify relevant research questions to which the archaeological data from the site could contribute. Research focused on the time period during which the archaeological features were deposited (the late nineteenth century through the 1920s). Because of the high turnover in occupancy and the wide date range of artifacts documented in features, it was not possible to directly associate features with specific individuals. However, review of contemporary primary sources helped to interpret the nature and duration of occupation on the property, to identify the activities that occurred there, and to provide insight into the demography, socioeconomic status, and cultural background of the people who resided there at the time the features were created.

Feature locations were superimposed over a 1906 Sanborn map to associate features with historic-period street addresses. Los Angeles City Directories as well as United States Census records from the time period corresponding with the residential development of the area (1880s to 1920s) were reviewed to determine the occupants of the addresses as they changed through time. Eight addresses associated with 175 names were identified.

United States Census records from 1900, 1910, and 1920 were reviewed (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1900, 1910, 1920). The 1890 census records for California were destroyed in a fire in 1921 and are no longer available (Ancestry.com 2014a). Census records indicated a person’s name, age, marital status, birthplace, immigration status, occupation, and literacy; whether the person rented or owned their home; and the names and relationships of household members. Also reviewed were immigration and military service records and contemporary newspaper articles.

Research revealed that, in general, residents were a culturally diverse group of working-class men and women. This is consistent with contemporary historic accounts of the character of this part of Los Angeles. Most residents held working-class or skilled labor occupations; common men’s occupations included laborer, porter, coremaker, pipefitter, carpenter, bootblack, and teamster; women’s occupations included seamstress, domestic, laundress, dressmaker, student, and cook.

The censuses and city directories document frequent turnover in the occupants of the residences at each address. In many cases, occupants changed virtually every year. An average of 22 people lived at each address over the 27-year span (1894-1921) during which the addresses were listed in city directories and censuses. This high turnover in occupancy seems to indicate that residents rented or boarded at their accommodations, and that there was a fair amount of geographic mobility among this population. Census data confirm that the residents were largely tenants rather than homeowners.

Changes over Time: 1900-1920

Examining the census records from the period between 1900 and 1920 provides a snapshot of the significant changes in occupancy, immigration status, gender, and race over that time period (Figure 7). Between 1900 and 1920, the number of male residents increased. The gender balance shifted from roughly equal in 1900 and 1910 to a majority of male residents (61 percent) in 1920.
Based on the 1900 census, the majority of residents at that time were white, although there was a notable African-American presence (one out of six households). This presence was sustained between 1900 and 1920, when the number of black residents increased slightly, from 29 percent in 1900, to 37 percent in 1910, and to 35 percent in 1920. This is significantly higher than the proportion of African-Americans in the total population of Los Angeles, which did not exceed 3 percent during this period (Grimes 2008). Two Japanese residents were documented in 1920.

The most significant change over time, however, was in the number of immigrants. Only one immigrant (of French origin) was present in 1900; however, by 1910 immigrants and their children (all Italian) made up 24 percent of the population. By 1920, 50 percent of residents were immigrants or the children of immigrants. Italian immigrants and their children still held a significant place in the community in 1920, comprising 22 percent of LAN-4460H’s total population; however, Mexican immigrants and their children were now the dominant immigrant group, comprising 26 percent of the population.

Immigration documents and military draft registries indicate that most of the Italian immigrants originated in the northern Italian regions of Piedmont and Liguria. Places of origin included Monastero di Vasco, Genoa, Mombaruzzo, Monferrat, Carru, Piedmonte, and Mondovi (Ancestry.com 2014b). Similar information on place of origin was not available for immigrants from Mexico.

Another significant change between 1900 and 1920 was in the rate of home ownership. The 1900 census showed that four out of the six households for which data were available owned their homes, whereas all households listed in the 1910 and 1920 censuses were renters.
CONCLUSION

By using the complementary data sets of archaeological data and historical documentation in conjunction, a more complete picture of the history of LAN-4460H and the people who lived there emerges. The changes over time documented at LAN-4460H parallel the larger demographic shifts in Los Angeles during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The coming of the transcontinental railroads to Los Angeles led to the construction of single-family homes in the 1880s, and residents of households within the boundaries of LAN-4460H at this time were likely to be white and American, and to own their homes. However, there was a much larger number of African-American residents compared to the city as a whole. The coming of the railroad also led to immigration to Los Angeles from other regions. In the 1910s and 1920s, the population of LAN-4460H, like much of the city, reflected an increasing number of Italian and Mexican residents. Occupants during this period were also likely to hold working-class jobs and to be renters. Finally, as industry in Los Angeles grew, the neighborhood became predominantly industrial in use by the 1920s, its residents having relocated and most houses having been demolished.

Based solely on archaeological evidence, the refuse deposit features documented at site LAN-4460H provided little insight into the lives of the people who created them. However, supplementing analysis of the material culture with documentary evidence provides insight into the demography and lifeways of this working-class neighborhood, as well as the changing character of Los Angeles during a time of industrialization and growth.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank Environmental Science Associates and LADWP for their support of this project. Special thanks to Vanessa Ortiz, who performed the construction monitoring and feature documentation.

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