

## PRESENCE AND ABSENCE IN THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDS OF TWO 1960S HIPPIE COMMUNES

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*As with presence, the absence of information in the archaeological record informs our knowledge of the past. In this article, we contrast the states of “presence” and “absence” in the archaeological records of two “hippie” communes located in the San Francisco Bay area: the “Ranch” (CA-MRN-193/H), home of the Grateful Dead-associated Chosen Family commune existing from 1967 to 1969, and the “Lodge” (CA-SON-2133H), home of a little-known commune from 1967 to 1968. While presence is a concept commonly utilized in archaeology, the concept of absence is not. Yet an adequate understanding of what is not present in the archaeological record is equally beneficial to the understanding of almost any site (cf. Fowles and Heupel 2013). At both of these commune sites, accidental fires destroyed the main living quarters, creating what are essentially “time capsules” of hippie material culture. Analysis of the fire debris informs our understanding of the counterculture of California’s recent past.*

### THE LODGE

In 1964, Everett Shapiro purchased the remote Bear Creek Ranch (formerly, the Hurd Ranch), located in the Mayacama Mountains, between Napa Valley and the Valley of the Moon (Parkman 2011) (Figure 1). Following his purchase of these 433 mountainous acres, Shapiro advertised for a caretaker. A caretaker was hired and, later, without Shapiro’s knowledge, allowed numerous friends to come and live on the property. It appears that these people called their new home “the Lodge,” in deference to the old hunting lodge, which had originally been the home of homesteaders Ray and Bertha Hurd (Gresham 1983). It has been estimated that about 30 “hippies” lived at the Lodge full-time (Lortie 1978:8, citing an interview with Milo Sheppard, April 1, 1977) and that as many as 90 visited the property on weekends (Lortie 1978, citing an interview with Everett Shapiro, April 5, 1977). They did not all live in the four-room ranch house, though. Apparently, there were as many as four separate campsites located on the property. Our archaeological survey of the area has yet to locate evidence of these campsites.

Sometime in 1968, the ranch house burned to the ground in what is assumed to have been an accidental fire. Shapiro thought the fire might have been caused by an untended candle (Lortie 1978), an explanation confirmed by us in a recent interview we conducted with the son of a couple of the residents. The hippies abandoned the Lodge following the fire. In 1969, the fire debris could still be seen in piles atop the house site (Kent Mckowskli, personal communication 2015). The State of California purchased the property on December 12, 1971 for inclusion in Sugarloaf Ridge State Park. It was around this time that either Shapiro or the State used a bulldozer to push the fire debris off the house site and down a hillside some 30 ft. away.

In our archaeological investigation, we excavated 51 1-x-1-m units in and around what we call the “push zone,” the track the bulldozer took in pushing the fire debris off the house site. The vast majority of our units were excavated to a depth of just 10 cm. The cultural soils of the test area ranged from about 4 to 8 cm and represented the bits and pieces of artifacts that passed beneath the blade of the bulldozer, as well as charcoal and ash. Several of our units were located farther down the hillside, where the relocated fire debris had accumulated. These units were excavated to a depth of 20 cm and did not reach the bottom of the cultural deposit. In our reconstruction of the site formation, we modeled a fire

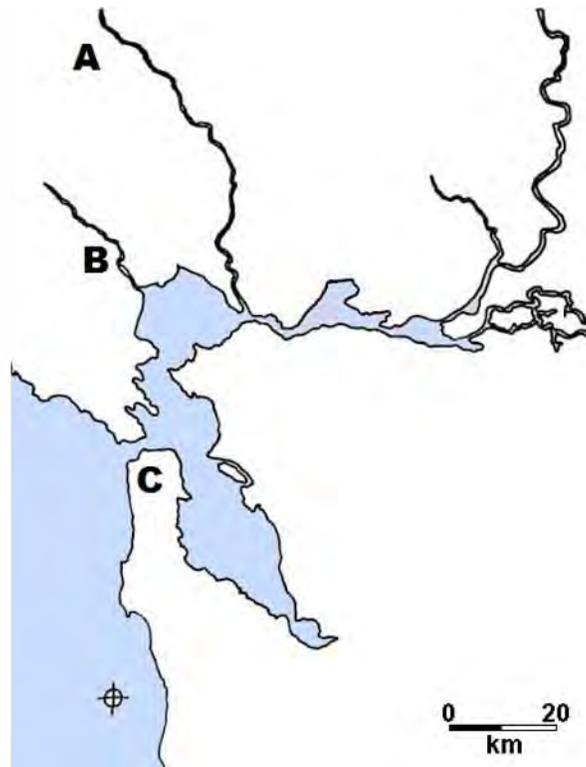


Figure 1. Map showing the locations of the Lodge and Ranch in the northern San Francisco Bay area. A, the Lodge; B, the Ranch; C, Haight-Ashbury.

debris “wave” pushed 30 ft. to the hillside, with some artifacts breaking in the process, and some passing beneath the blade. We anticipated finding more intact items in the thicker deposit on the hillside, where the series of artifact-laden “waves” came to rest. The 51 excavation units yielded more than 1,000 artifacts, including fragments of ceramic cups and dishes, glass bottles, pull tabs, various flatware, jewelry, coins, buttons, snap fasteners, grommets, spent cartridge cases, and saw-cut meat bones, among numerous other things (Figure 2).

### THE RANCH

The Chosen Family commune was an intentional community that resided at what is now Olompali State Historic Park in 1967-1969 (Fernandez and Parkman 2011; Miller 1999:70-72; Parkman 2014) (Figure 1). The communards referred to the site of their commune as “the Ranch.” While it originally consisted of 26 men, women, and children, The Chosen Family grew to as many as 90 members in its second year of existence, overwhelming the Burdell Mansion, a 26-room adobe, wood, and stucco structure, once termed the “Whitehouse of Hippiedom” (Marin Independent-Journal 1969).

The Chosen Family commune was founded at Olompali in late November 1967 and lasted until mid-August 1969, a period of about 600 days. By early Thanksgiving 1967, Don McCoy (December 7, 1931—October 11, 2004) and his three young daughters had moved into the Burdell Mansion, which they rented for \$1,000 per month. McCoy invited several of his close friends, including other single parents and their children, to join him and his daughters at the ranch. Because McCoy and the 25 others had chosen the members of their new “family,” they called it “the Chosen Family.” The commune’s matriarch, Sandra Barton (May 8, 1920—September 12, 2002), and Sheila McKendrick (1933— ) were the other driving forces behind the founding of the Chosen Family.



*Figure 2. Artifacts in the fire debris at the Lodge (Unit S10/W4). Photo by Breck Parkman, September 26, 2014.*

In the spring and early summer of 1966, the members of the Grateful Dead had themselves lived at Olompali, and the band continued to visit the ranch during the time that the commune was living there (Brandelius 1989:31-36; Jackson 2000:104-105; Scully 1996:53-59, 63). According to the last caretaker at Olompali before the Dead moved in, it was the curved ceilings in the Burdell Mansion's living room and the promise of enhanced acoustics that sold them on the place (Lew 1997:4). Olompali represented "freedom" to the Grateful Dead, as it offered them a respite from their increasingly hectic world (McNally 2003:145). Olompali represented freedom to the members of the Chosen Family as well.

In the early morning hours of February 2, 1969, an electrical fire destroyed the Burdell Mansion. Those who were in the house at the time escaped with their lives, but all of their worldly possessions were destroyed. The fire that destroyed the mansion created a fortuitous and completely unintentional time capsule of Sixties artifacts, unlike any other time capsule known from that era, with the exception of the Lodge. Typically, time capsules are intentionally planned, thus offering participants the opportunity to carefully select the contents. The creation of the Olompali "capsule," however, offered no such opportunity for selection. As a result, this collection of artifacts allows for a more complete and uncensored look at Sixties commune culture than might be otherwise possible.

Because the fire debris inside the Burdell Mansion contained hazardous materials (asbestos and lead), it was removed by a specially trained hazmat crew and stored in 26 55-gal. drums. Several years later, a second hazmat crew cleaned the materials stored in the drums, making them available for our



*Figure 3. Artifacts recovered from the fire debris at the Ranch. Photo by Victor Bjelajac, 2009.*

study. Almost 2,000 artifacts were recovered, including ceramic sherds, flatware, beer cans, jewelry, coins, saw-cut meat bones, items of clothing, shoes, and countless other things (Figure 3).

Perhaps the most exciting of these artifacts are the 93 vinyl records we recovered from the fire debris. To date, 55 of the records have been identified, representing almost every musical genre (Parkman 2014). The musical diversity represented by these records suggests that the commune was composed of an equally diverse population. The records are part of the individual cultural baggage brought to the commune by its members.

The Chosen Family was associated with the Grateful Dead. Because of this, it is one of the better-known communes from the 1960s. For over 30 years, the senior author has studied the Chosen Family commune. The recovery and analysis of artifacts from the fire debris has attracted considerable international interest (e.g., Ainsworth 2009; Akerman 2009; Anonymous 2014; Bar-Lev and Scorsese n.d.; Brunwasser 2009; Ferris 2009; Fimrite 2009; Franz 2009a, 2009b, 2014; Gibbs and McCoy n.d.; Goetzman 2009; Hermann 2009; Kievman 2011; Mooallem 2014; Norberg 2009; Oerzen 2011; Overbye 2011; Pastino 2014a, 2014b; Patel 2014; Rottman 2009; Schofield 2010, 2011).

### **THE HIPPIE DIASPORA OF 1967**

By the end of summer 1967, the youthful enthusiasm and naïveté of the initial Summer of Love experience in the Haight-Ashbury District of San Francisco had been replaced by a harder and more unsightly reality, as blatant commercialization, harder drugs, and meaner people flooded into the area,

overwhelming the neighborhood and the patience of the authorities (Miller 1999:68; Morgan 1991:184-185). Newcomers were at the mercy of the streets and dependent on an ineffective social welfare system. This resulted in the participants (“hippies”) being uncomfortably “Inside” (cf. Halpern 1953) the dominant culture or what they considered to be the “straight” world. In essence, many of the original participants went back to the land in order to live “Outside” the dominant culture, one of the characteristics of the counterculture movement. By moving from Inside to the Outside of culture, they became part of the “Wild” (cf. Parkman 1994). The common albeit inaccurate perception of hippies as dirty and unkempt social dropouts is an indication of their “wild” status in the eyes of the dominant culture. For many Americans, hippies represented a threat to the social order in the same way that people have long imagined wolves and other wild animals representing a threat to human life.

On October 6, 1967, about 80 residents of the Haight-Ashbury marked the “Death of Hippie” by carrying a cardboard coffin in a solemn march through the old neighborhood (Anthony 1980:175; Perry 1984:244). The night before, a ceremony called “Wake for Hippie” was held at All Saints Church (Perry 1984). At the conclusion of the next day’s march, the coffin was burned, in a collective acknowledgement that everything had changed.

On a sunny afternoon in the fall of 1967, at the end of the Summer of Love, a band of San Francisco hippies solemnly filled a coffin with stereotyped artifacts of hippiedom and burned it, pronouncing, as they did, the “death of hip” (Miller 1991:3).

The stereotypical “artifacts” included beads, marijuana, and copies of the *Barb*, as well as a few daily newspapers (Perry 1984:244). Turned off by the negative changes they were seeing all around them, many of the original flower children of the Haight-Ashbury chose to migrate elsewhere, thus fueling a hippie diaspora. Their exodus led to the creation of new communes in northern California and elsewhere in the American West, including the famous New Buffalo commune outside Taos, New Mexico (Kopecky 2004, 2006). Their back-to-the-land movement was characterized by a desire for self-sufficiency and isolation. The Ranch and the Lodge included among their members individuals who had fled the dangers of the Haight-Ashbury.

## PRESENCE AND ABSENCE

We have examined the material constituents of the fire debris at the Ranch and Lodge and identified patterns denoting both presence and absence in their respective archaeological records. For the most part, the two communes mirror one another in the remains of their material culture. Artifacts associated with music are present at both sites.

We have found the remains of musical instruments – a guitar tailpiece at the Ranch and a tuba mouthpiece at the Lodge – as well as store-bought music. We found 93 vinyl records and four reel-to-reel tapes at the Ranch, as well as a stereo receiver and turntable. At the Lodge, we found a turntable and several small fragments of vinyl records.

We have found numerous saw-cut meat bones at both sites. In addition to finding beef and chicken bones at the Lodge, we see evidence that an occasional deer was hunted for food. At the Ranch, we found beef and lamb bones. The Chosen Family had a large kitchen in the Burdell Mansion, and the occupants did a lot of cooking. At the Lodge, however, we see little evidence that meals were prepared from scratch. Instead, we found numerous peanut butter jars and the plastic wrappers of sliced cheese and luncheon meats. We also found hot dog wrappers and individual ketchup packets.

We have found evidence of alcoholic beverages at both sites. At the Ranch, we found several dozen beer cans, primarily Coors, Olympia, and Budweiser. We also found portions of a tequila bottle and the bottles of several jug wines. At the Lodge, we found numerous beer bottles, primarily Lucky Lager. We also found cans of Budweiser and Pabst Blue Ribbon. A fragment of a single jug wine bottle was also found.

A single Coca Cola bottle was found at the Ranch. At the Lodge, though, we found numerous soda pop bottles, primarily Frostie Root Beer. Pepsi, Coca Cola, and Fresca bottles were also found.

Although no drug paraphernalia or other evidence of illicit drug use was found at the Lodge, we suspect that drugs were used there. At the Ranch, we found a custom-made roach clip. Drug use at the Ranch is documented in countless interviews and primarily involved the use of marijuana and LSD. Two infamous drug busts occurred at the Ranch in January 1969. To this day, members of the Chosen Family insist that they were set up by a police informant.

We found evidence of fashion at both sites. Items such as an eyelash curler, go-go boots, face cream, lipstick tubes, and countless photos belonging to the Chosen Family indicate that commune members cared about their appearance. We believe the same was true at the Lodge, where we found cans of shaving cream, razors, and men's suit pants, among other things. Various items of intact clothing, shoes, and belts were found at both sites. We also found numerous buttons, snap-fasteners, and grommets at both of these sites.

### ABSENCE

Love beads and children's toys are present at the Ranch, but seemingly absent at the Lodge. At the Ranch, we found a diversity of toys, including a plastic bed for a Barbie doll, a plastic template for shaping play dough, and a complete set of a rubber ball and metal jacks. We also found chess and checker pieces. There were over a dozen children living at Olompali in 1967-1969, almost all of them young girls.

There were at least five children living at the Lodge in 1967-1968. Their names are among those of about a dozen individuals we have thus far identified. Unlike the Ranch, there appear to be no easily identifiable toys present at the Lodge, in spite of the children's presence. A single checker piece was found, but nothing that we would immediately associate with youth. The one possible exception is a colorful rubber ball (Figure 4). The ball is yellow, green, red, and blue. Partially deflated, it appears to have been about 3 in. in diameter when in use. It has dozens of small puncture marks, suggesting that it has been chewed by a dog. We suspect that this was a dog's ball, but one of us feels that a case can be made for the ball having once belonged to a child. As the junior author explains,

Well, this looks like a ball a kid would play with and I think that maybe a dog stole it from a kid and that's why it has teeth marks. For an example, I used to have some bouncy balls and my dog, Yogi, always took them and bit them and that's why they have some teeth marks. I'm guessing that a dog stole this ball from a kid and bit the ball. Another possibility is that a kid got tired of the ball and gave it to the dog.

Among the dozen or so names that we have identified as being residents of the Lodge is one Jack the Dog. It is likely that Jack was not the only canine living there. The chewed ball is the only evidence we have seen as to the presence of dogs. The evidence of children is even more limited.

Children may have been peripheral to the purpose of the adults living at the Lodge. In contrast, Don McCoy founded the Chosen Family as a safe haven for the commune's children. In their first year of existence as an intentional community, McCoy had an almost unlimited bank account and underwrote all of the commune's expenses and desires. He paid for horses, motorcycles, and toys. Children may have been a lesser focus of the Lodge's day-to-day affairs, and money was likely more limited. Regardless, we feel that the near absence of toys at the Lodge is significant.

While glass beads are common at the Ranch, we have seen none at the Lodge. In almost all of the many hundreds of photos taken of the Chosen Family during their time at Olompali, almost everyone is seen wearing "love beads." Examples of these beads were recovered from the fire debris inside the Burdell Mansion (Figure 5). Since glass beads were so common among "hippies" of the era, we find their absence at the Lodge to be puzzling.

At the Ranch, members of the Chosen Family had assigned kitchen duties, and meals were typically prepared and consumed family-style. At the Lodge, however, the evidence leads us to believe



*Figure 4. Rubber ball with bite marks from the Lodge (Unit S10/W4). Photo by Breck Parkman, June 28, 2015.*

that most meals were hastily prepared using ready-made ingredients such as sliced cheese and luncheon meats, peanut butter, and hot dogs. Except for a single dry red bean, we found no evidence of more extensive food preparation, although we assume some did occur. Interestingly, not a single cooking pot or pan was recovered at either of the two communes, perhaps an indication that larger metal items survived the fire and were salvaged afterwards. For example, members of the Chosen Family returned to the Burdell Mansion the day after the fire and picked through the ashes in search of anything that could be salvaged.

Finally, we find a remarkable contrast when it comes to the willingness of the former communards to share their stories. Unlike the Chosen Family, whose members continue to gladly share their stories with the public (cf. Franz 2009a; Gibbs and McCoy n.d.; Karman 2015), the former residents of the Lodge appear to have no interest in talking about their experiences. Our request to interview some of them was denied.

## CONCLUSIONS

If presence addresses the authenticity of stereotypes, what can be said of absence? For example, the absence of glass beads at the Lodge seems striking to us. An infatuation with glass beads (“love beads”) was the norm at the Ranch, as attested by the archaeological record and demonstrated in the hundreds of photographs taken of the Chosen Family. To at least one observer, hippies exhibited “an almost childish fascination in beads” (Jones 1967:18). Indeed, beads were one of the stereotypical items placed in the mock coffin for the “Death of Hip” event at the conclusion of the Summer of Love (Perry 1984:244). The apparent absence of beads at the Lodge suggests that the members of this intentional community did not necessarily fit the stereotypical image of the “hippie,” an interpretation further



*Figure 5. Wooden box with glass beads from the Ranch (P1664-2-30).*

supported by the discovery of multiple shaving cream cans and razors in the fire debris. Of course, there was no such thing as a stereotypical hippie.

There was never a “standard hippie,” whose behavior or beliefs could accurately represent the counterculture. Rather, hippies were a group made up of thousands of individuals engaged in a multitude of activities, whose presence in and effect on society have been abbreviated in the necessity for historical simplification (Issitt 2009:14).

The communes at the Ranch and the Lodge began in the latter part of 1967, as residents of the Haight-Ashbury and its environs fled the urban environment, a movement we have termed the Hippie Diaspora. The Ranch blossomed in 1968, but began its collapse once it had become an open community near year’s end. What remained of the Ranch fell apart in the first half of 1969. We do not know the triumphs and misfortunes that characterized the Lodge in 1968. We only know that the house fire hastened its end, just as was to be the case at the Ranch a few months later. The year 1968 has been described as the year “that rocked the world” (Kurlansky 2004) and when “the dream died” (Witcover 1997). It was an incredibly dynamic year in both good and bad ways. The world has not been the same since then.

Our interviews with members of the Chosen Family testify to the good intentions of the commune. Founded as a safe haven for children, the commune accomplished many of its utopian goals in its first year of existence. By year’s end, though, a number of things conspired to implode the community, chief among them being the opening of the community to outsiders, including some newcomers who did not share the same idealistic goals that had inspired the creators of the commune. Equally significant in the demise of the community was the excessive behavior that gradually overtook it, especially in terms of

drug use. We have no evidence that a similar scenario transpired at the Lodge, but there is reason to believe that may have been the case.

In spite of the excess, there were many positive aspects to the Chosen Family's experience and of other communes like it. The counterculture movement was itself a catalyst for many of the important social and environmental advances that we benefit from today. Women's liberation, civil rights, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, environmentalism, and sustainability are part of the positive legacy of the "hippies" (Issitt 2009:66-67; Miller 1991:123-144). By carefully sorting through the vast material culture that was recovered from the fire debris of the Lodge and the Ranch, we hope to reconstruct a picture of life from the ashes of these failed communities. We believe that what is present and absent in the ashes of these communes have equal bearing in informing our understanding of this dynamic and troubled time and help justify the archaeology of California's recent past.

### POSTSCRIPT

Two months after presenting this paper in Redding, we returned to the Lodge for the final few days of fieldwork. While removing the large metal items (bed frames, refrigerator, wood-burning stove, etc.) from the slope below the site, we exposed a considerable number of smaller artifacts, including intact bottles, jars, and cans, some still bearing intact labels. Plastic food wrappers were also recovered, as were numerous smaller items, including broken ceramics, cartridge cases, flatware, buttons, shoes, belts, and grommets. Among the items recovered were two glass beads, a child's tricycle, and the two metal axles and four plastic wheels of a ca. 1966 Playskool sit-on-top giraffe. In our presentation in Redding, we reported that no beads or children's toys had been found at the Lodge. Obviously, that finding is no longer valid. These new findings will be addressed in a future paper.

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