

FROM MISSIONS TO CHINATOWNS TO HOMESTEADS TO MILITARY TRAINING CENTERS: A PERSPECTIVE ON HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY IN CALIFORNIA

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Since the inception of the Society for California Archaeology (SCA) in 1966, historical archaeology has grown from a grass roots effort focused on preserving local history to the rich multi-layered research evident today. From cities to towns and forests to deserts we have explored the refuse left behind by generations of Californians. We have studied when and how artifacts were made, learned that groups from different heritage backgrounds leave distinct cultural markers in their discarded trash, and have interpreted technologies, industries, and land use through landscapes. This perspective draws from the author's own experiences and discusses past, present and future avenues of research.

My first field school was an excavation searching for old garden buildings and a greenhouse on the front lawn of Bidwell Mansion. As a double major in history and anthropology, I was pretty happy with this school. At the end of every Saturday's dig we went around the group and related what we found. For most of us the answer was nails or bits of aqua glass (always said with a heavy disappointed sigh). My response was often "I found 36 nails, all with square heads! They MUST be from the greenhouse! And nineteenth century aqua glass!!" I loved the combination of history and archaeology; I had found my niche.

Since then I have experienced numerous changes in our field, watched trends that come and go, changed with the times to keep current and employed, and read up on new directions. I want to share this personal journey and my own observations on the historical bent in our profession, while emphatically stating that this is just that; a personal view.

1960S: IT'S ALL ABOUT RETRIEVAL

When the SCA started in 1966, most historical archaeology at the time revolved around state and national parks. California State Parks employees explored missions and other state parks, but they were also the only game in town for archaeology on state land. For federal agencies, the National Park Service (NPS) was the key, with Paul Schumacher leading the charge. This was the era of building large reservoirs, Delta-Mendota Canal and the California aqueducts, and constructing highways, like Interstate 5 (I-5). The Parks staff – national and state - was called in to conduct salvage archaeology whenever it became an issue: think of I-5 going through the old historic sections of San Diego, Sacramento, or Yreka. These salvage efforts were down and dirty; get the material out of the construction path, bag it up, and take it back to the lab. Usually, there was no money to analyze material or do anything with it once it was out of the ground, but at least it was stored in a lab and not discarded. Reservoirs built by the Bureau of Reclamation also had cadres of archaeologists and many volunteers scrambling around, usually hired as contractors by NPS. The SCA has its roots in this age of retrieval. A review of the SCA newsletters from the late 1960s reflects the salvage nature of archaeology at the time (SCA 1967, 1969). In 1968, for example, 13 reservoirs were surveyed by archaeologists affiliated with San Francisco State University, California State University Chico, University of California Los Angeles, University of California Davis, and California State University Sacramento, and many sites were excavated.

In a time defined by free love, the hippie movement, the rise of rock and roll, social unrest, and massive national change, for us, it was all about retrieval.

1970S: IT'S ALL ABOUT THE THINGS

If the 1960s centered on salvage archaeology, the 1970s seemed to be learning about everything that was recovered. During this decade the emphasis was on recovering material items fast, identifying makers, technology, and what the items were. Studies of Chinese emigrant sites and missions were emphasized in California archaeology during this time, and efforts to identify objects manufactured in different countries were at the forefront of historical archaeology. My first paid archaeology job was in the 1970s, a time when the main employer of seasonal techs was the United States Forest Service (USFS). Mandated to inventory all cultural resources on public lands, the USFS took this to heart. The summer I was hired on the Plumas there were over 100 archaeologists from across the nation working as techs on California forests; 12 of us just on the Plumas. The handouts we received for field guides reflects the emphasis on identifying site ages and on material culture. We were also taught to view any site we found as if no one would ever be there again and learned to describe, describe, describe. We studied log cabin construction methods, Jim Rock's can guides (Rock 1980, 1987) were our bibles (since we found LOTS of cans), and we memorized the bottle shape, finish and base guides prepared for Forest Service seasonal technicians by Siskiyou National Forest archaeologist Jim Rock (later available in Rock 1980, 1987, and 1989). The forests are filled with historical archaeology sites from mining, logging, recreation, grazing, ranching, and homesteading activities. All of us working on the forests HAD to learn to date the sites and to describe or draw what we found.

In the midst of disco balls and punk rock, the fall of Saigon, celebrating a woman's right to choose, and long lines for gas, in my world of California archaeology, it was all about the things.

1980S: IT'S ALL ABOUT THE FUNCTION

The early 1980s was still a time of large scale surveys on federal lands and great employment opportunities for archaeologists. While "things" were still important and description was a necessity, change was in the air. By 1982, historical archaeology was beginning to move beyond identification of material cultural. Inspired by Rick Sprague at the University of Idaho and others, we began to look at artifacts for what they were used for or contained, rather than how they were manufactured (Sprague 1981). We paid more attention to reuse of items for secondary purposes and had great debates over many a beer about HOW to classify a reused item – by its intended function or secondary function? Our analysis techniques, methods in the field, and interpretive approaches all changed. For those of us working in the forests, where so many sites were primarily limited to the surface, our methods expanded to include metal detection and scraping back duff in large grids to expose the artifacts in place. We carefully mapped material by function, using the data to interpret and identify activity areas at sites. I lump most of the 1980s into functional analysis with a fascination on defining use areas on sites and proving it with detailed overlays of artifact distribution patterns. Our focus was on households, building on Jim Deetz's assertion that the way to understand a community or area was to examine each household individually (Deetz 1982).

While our nation tried to accept high-waisted jeans and big hair, pop music and heavy metal bands, we struggled to understand function and learned to integrate things with use.

1990S: IT'S ALL ABOUT DIRECTIONS

In 1993 Don Hardesty gave a paper at an SCA meeting on the state of historical archaeology in California. His paper reflected the trends at the time. He identified four archaeological "hot spots;" Spanish Colonial archaeology, Overseas Chinese archaeology, urban archaeology, and industrial archaeology. Using a world-system theory base, he identified problem domains pivotal to California, including economic and ethnic diversity, the evolution of regional communities and independence

(encouraged by transcontinental railroad and road network development), evolution of technology leading to industrial development; and evolution of landscapes (Hardesty 1993).

For me, it meant there was more to study, to think about, and more directions to pursue. In keeping up with the times and growth in historical archaeology, California historical archaeologists expanded our studies beyond the households and the regions, and thought of commerce, trade, exchange, and the affects of world economic changes and events on our little corner of the world. For mining sites, as an example, we began to view each adit, tailings pile, mill, or camp within a larger whole. We used aerials and extensive mapping to tie in individual resources with the ditches, road systems, tailings piles, and networks that linked them all together. This holistic view was encouraged by NPS bulletins on identifying and recording rural landscapes (McClelland 1989).

Expanding into areas other than Spanish colonial and Chinese sites, we began considering not only ethnic, but religious, gender, and even economic diversity. The SCA meeting at Asilomar in the mid-90s had an all-day symposium with papers discussing historical archaeology of Chinese, Japanese, Italian, Irish, Jewish, Basque, Mexican, Spanish, African American, and woman-occupied sites. We moved beyond recording features to comparative studies focused on cultural choices and traditional methods.

The Loma Prieta earthquake in San Francisco 1989 led to decades of studies of Oakland and San Francisco neighborhoods. Economic boom also lead to rapid expansion of urban centers. Hand in hand with expanding beyond households and into studies of neighborhoods came the need to develop thoughtful and detailed research designs, supported by strong historical research, before digging (Praetzellis [ed] 1994; Praetzellis and Praetzellis [eds] 1993). The easy questions of “when was this site occupied? What were they eating?” gave way to questions centered around social mores and cultural traditions (examining effects of Victorian era social ethics, religious choices, and ethnic background on household choices). As urban archaeology grew, our methods changed, influenced from our friends across the sea. Backhoes became our friends. Backhoes could move dirt fast and we could scrape a few inches at a time, exposing broad areas and looking for soil discoloration, tops of foundations, pits, and horizontal sheet scatter deposits. The Harris Matrix became important in studying site structure (Harris 1979). And, with the recovery of literally TONS of artifacts, we struggled with curation and the need to discard artifacts after cataloging, with opinions exchanged through the SCA newsletter forum (Praetzellis and Costello 2002).

This age of urban archaeology also led to the “giving back to the public” movement, with a flurry of books and articles meant for the general public, as well as short documentaries of our work, exhibits, and pamphlets, brochures, and booklets. We began to write public aspects into treatment plans and teamed with local historical societies and governments to provide school tours. The forest service promoted their *Passport in Time* program and teamed with Cultural Resource Management companies and other agencies to provide volunteer opportunities to the public.

For me, the 1990s was about multi-tasking and juggling basketball, golf, and volleyball tournaments, school field trips, Pokeman, and game boys. It seemed appropriate that work also had me moving in many directions.

2000: IT’S ALL ABOUT THE MERGERS

By the turn of the twenty-first century I was seeing a blending or merging of all the trends that developed since the late 1960s. We did a lot of historical research, using it to build thoughtful research designs and methodological strategies focused on high yield return. In the field, combining the use of backhoes with hand excavation proved effective and became routine, as did applying stratigraphic methods to “read” sites. Material cultural recovered was sorted and dated by manufacturing technique, color, but also by function. We looked for activity areas on sites and studied each individual site within a

larger landscape. The effects of external forces on site formation and use (world systems) became a normal part of our studies. These are all good developments.

Life is about mergers. We merge relationships with work, we blend families to create new units, and in the twenty-first century of archaeology we are learning to merge old ways with new techniques as we move into the future.

2010S AND BEYOND: IT'S ALL ABOUT INTEGRATION

So where we today in 2016, and what are does the future hold? In the last five years it seems that historical archaeology has turned to integrating the methods and directions of the past with modern technologies and science, assisted by satellite imaging, total stations, GIS, digital photography, drones, tablets, and other advances. For example, in December of 2015 the *San Francisco Examiner* reported on a find made by Sonoma State University in downtown San Francisco (San Francisco Examiner 2015). Of interest to me was the discussion of how City planners were taking historical maps and building GIS layers used in planning to predict sensitive areas. This example of using history and GIS technology to help plan whether a construction site requires excavation prior to the start of work is one that I believe will continue to grow and become important. Along the same lines, I think 3D reconstruction and imaging to record data, reconstruct site layout and design, or capture data as part of mitigation will continue to grow.

I am pleased with the trend now to incorporate new analytical techniques that rely on chemistry (starch residue analysis, chemical analysis of bottle contents, glaze analysis to determine origin of celadon, etc.). For the Market Street project, starch residue was recovered in bowls and identified as rice (Becks 2012). What amazed me is that the bowls analyzed were recovered in the 1980s, cleaned and washed, and stored for over 25 years before analysis was attempted. And they still identified residue!

As excavation becomes more and more expensive, I believe that other universities, companies, or groups will follow the lead of Stanford University, California Polytechnic State University, and the California Department of Transportation and turn to old, unanalyzed or partially unanalyzed collections for study. Remember all that salvage work in the 1960s? It is time to open those boxes and see what is there. The Market Street Chinatown collection has led to many theses, articles, papers, dissertations, and presentations (Stanford University 2016). So adopt an orphan collection, please!

We have a new buzz word in our archaeology CRM world: Creative Mitigation. Basically, instead of traditional testing of a site or group of sites, we are being encouraged to look at other ways to spend that money in order to give something back to the public and communities. These meetings have a session showing some of the products of "thinking outside the box." The SAA held a webinar on March 30 (2016) on this topic. The *Sands of War* short documentary, for example, is a great example of incorporating history and archaeology to educate the public about using the Mojave Desert to train troops for war in Africa and other dry climates. The video was prepared as proposed solar farm mitigation for impacts to sites dating from this training operation. I think this creativeness will continue.

Along the same lines, I believe the concept of community-based archaeology will grow stronger in the future. In the 1960s volunteers made a huge difference in surveying those proposed reservoir sites and salvaging artifacts (SCA 1967). We need to recognize that in many cases the public is our employer. Working with volunteers, preparing articles for public dissemination, encouraging site stewardship, and participating in Passport in Time programs does not have to be limited to agencies with big pockets. We all need to step up to the plate and grow our public outreach efforts.

We need to remember that the public is interested in the past, including events and sites from our own recent past. When I was a young teen rebelling against my parents, my friends and I spent long hours discussing how we could run away, hitchhike to Marin County, and join one of those communes everyone

seemed to talk about. We were sure we could dress right, get our beads and flowers on, and oh, pass for 17. Then we read that the commune had burned down and our dreams changed to joining a rock and roll band and being famous and rich.

So now, here it is almost 50 years later and archaeologists are studying that commune of my teen years. Breck Parkman has been in the forefront of this movement to study the recent past with his studies of Marin County communes from the 1960s (Parkman 2016). I never thought that looking at things I remember so clearly from my youth, like the Beatle's *Rubber Soul* album, jax, monopoly hotels, or love beads would be the wave of the future, but times change and integrating the old with the new is a positive and necessary step. The question (and challenge) facing our new generation of archaeologist is, can we keep evolving our profession and changing to keep up with the times?

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