JOHN ROMANI’S FORGOTTEN 1984 EXCAVATIONS AT CA-LAN-007 AND 
THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF NATIVE AMERICAN LOS ANGELES

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In 1984, John Romani led California Department of Transportation test excavations at CA-LAN-007, located on the edge of El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument. Romani’s team uncovered a site that included artifacts of Native American, Euro-American, and Chinese origin, as well as historic features, dating from the early American and Chinese occupation of Los Angeles. No final report was prepared, and over the following decades Romani’s excavations were forgotten. This article draws on archival sources to exhume the story of Romani’s excavation and then presents a preliminary analysis of the excavation’s findings, focusing on original analysis of the Native American artifacts curated at El Pueblo de Los Angeles. It is suggested that the artifacts were left by non-Gabrielino Mission Indians in the last half of the nineteenth century.

In 1984, John Romani led California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) excavations at CA-LAN-007 (hereafter referred to as LAN-007), located on the edge of El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument in Los Angeles, California. Romani’s team uncovered a site that included Native American artifacts and historic artifacts, and features from the early American period and Los Angeles’ nineteenth-century Chinatown. No final report was prepared, and over the following decades Romani’s excavations were forgotten. This article draws on archival sources to exhume the story of Romani’s excavation and presents a preliminary analysis of the excavation’s findings, focusing on original analysis of artifacts curated at El Pueblo de Los Angeles.

REDISCOVERING THE EXCAVATION

In the spring of 2018, AECOM was contracted by the City of Los Angeles Bureau of Engineering (LABOE) to provide cultural resources services on LABOE projects near the historic Los Angeles Plaza (Beherec 2018, 2019). The project sites were near the recorded location of LAN-007 (Figure 1). LAN-007 is located between two important historic resources. It is east of the National Register-listed El Pueblo de Los Angeles State Historic Park District, which includes both archaeological sites and historic buildings ranging from the late Spanish Colonial Period (1810s to 1821) through the Mexican Period (1821 to 1848) and into the American Period (Hunt 1972; Miller et al. 1981). It is also just west of and opposite Alameda Street of CA-LAN-1575, a major multicomponent archaeological site in the area of Union Station. CA-LAN-1575 includes a Native American cemetery that was used from the prehistoric into the Spanish periods (Goldberg et al. 1999). The site also includes a portion of Old Chinatown and a neighboring working class neighborhood and red light district. This part of Old Chinatown and L.A.’s vice district was demolished in 1933 to construct Union Station and was excavated in the 1980s and 1990s (Costello et al. 1999; Greenwood 1996; Meyer et al. 2005).

The site record for LAN-007 filed at the South Central Coastal Information Center (SCCIC) is unsatisfactory and leaves open many questions. What is the “pothole” depicted on the sketch map? Why does the sketch map appear to show a larger extent for the site than the location map? In the more than 35 years since the site record was prepared, did no one ever revisit an apparently prehistoric site in the middle of downtown Los Angeles?

A Google search for “LAN-007” quickly revealed a connection to Jay Frierman in the form of a finding aid for the Jay D. Frierman Papers (Salvano 2010). (Note: “finding aid” is the technical term used
by archivists to describe a document that facilitates discovery of materials within a collection.) The Frierman papers are located at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), Charles E. Young Research Library. Frierman was a professor of history and archaeology at UCLA who later worked as a consulting archaeologist at what was then El Pueblo State Historic Park.

Tracking down Frierman’s published works, I found *Historical Archaeology of Nineteenth-Century California*, a slim volume containing an essay by Frierman and another by Roberta Greenwood. In “The Pastoral Period in Los Angeles,” Frierman wrote:

> Of these [Native American] sites, only the Rancheria de los Poblanos has been documented through archaeological testing. . . . In the spring of 1984, Caltrans, in conjunction with El Pueblo de Los Angeles State Historic Park, undertook excavations at these sites [north and south of the Alameda Street on-ramp to US 101], with John F. Romani as archaeological director for Caltrans. The two areas were carefully surveyed, and several sites were excavated.
They proved to be extremely rich in both Indian and Chinese artifacts, yielding over eight thousand cataloged items (publication in progress). . . . This deposit had been reported by Meighan in 1951 as LAN-7, University of California Archaeological Site Survey Record. . . . the excavators could not reach sterile soil . . . 3 meters deep [Frierman 1992:26-27].

AECOM took this information to LABOE, who requested we find the excavation’s documentation. So, we contacted the SCCIC first, and they did not have any information about excavations taking place at LAN-007. Next, I visited UCLA. The LAN-007 folders in the Frierman papers appear to be preparations for both publications and displays in the historical monument that never took place. The Frierman papers also yielded a trove of reports documenting archaeological research in the Plaza area in the 1970s and 1980s, many of which were not filed at the SCCIC. Most of these reports were composed by Frierman himself, but a few reports by colleagues are also included. The most significant for contextualizing the LAN-007 findings is Frank Fenenga’s preliminary volume on the Avila Adobe excavations of 1971-1972 (Fenenga 1973). But there was no report on the LAN-007 excavations in the Frierman papers; instead, there was just a collection of notes that were impossible to understand alone.

Caprice “Kip” Harper, with the aid of Kristin Fusello, searched Caltrans District 7’s files and storage units and queried Headquarters. They found no record of Romani’s excavations ever having taken place. Romani left Caltrans about 1989. Deciding the best course of action was to check with Romani’s post-Caltrans employers, I contacted John M. Foster at Greenwood and Associates. He provided the most useful single document, a copy of a summary report completed more than a decade after the excavations (Romani 1997). The summary report contains a brief description of the excavations and site structure but no artifact catalog and no laboratory analysis of the artifacts.

Christopher Espinoza, General Manager at El Pueblo, found some correspondence related to the site (e.g., Caltrans 1989). Some, but not all, of the reports archived at UCLA were also located at El Pueblo. Aided by Mr. Espinoza and El Pueblo volunteer Mike Henderson, we made a diligent search of El Pueblo’s holdings, finding 28 boxes that contained many (though apparently not all) of the excavated artifacts.

A small archive of documents was also located at El Pueblo. This archive includes the excavation’s field paperwork and photographs, as well as correspondence and internal Caltrans memos and other documentation related to the excavation. The documents continue into the 1990s, after Romani left Caltrans. The later documents include letters from Frierman and others to Romani’s friend Jack Hunter (Figure 2; Sampson 2012:28). Hunter most likely gave these documents to Romani in the early 1990s, when Romani was planning his summary report. Drafts and additional copies of the completed summary report were also included. The archive of documents was mailed anonymously to El Pueblo in 2017, but the package included a return address, that of John Romani’s longtime Northridge home which was still the home of his widow Gwen at that time. The archive remained in a box with the note “Unsolicited Donation/Archaeological Reports/Rec. May 2017” until Mr. Espinoza relocated them in late 2018. Based on the summary report and documents in the El Pueblo archive and the Jay D. Frierman papers, we can reconstruct what likely happened.

**UNANTICIPATED DISCOVERY**

In 1980, Gene Huey and John Romani carried out an archaeological survey for the El Monte Busway Extension Project (Huey et al. 1980:25; Romani 1997:3). The site was first identified in 1951 by Clement Meighan as most of it was being destroyed by freeway construction. Meighan described it as a dump for Old Chinatown. Huey and Romani created the existing site forms for LAN-007 and were the first to identify Native American artifacts at the site. They noted that a “pothole” in the site form was a looter’s pit, not a construction excavation. Looting was observed again at the site in 1982. At that time, Caltrans Associate Environmental Planner Lois Webb and Romani recommended it be capped with fill (Webb and Romani 1982), but this appears never to have been done.
Unbeknownst to Huey and Romani, in 1981, a one-page Categorical Exemption (CE) was issued for the replacement of deteriorated irrigation systems and for replanting of landscaping along US 101. The CE concluded that the project would have no significant impact to historic properties (Ballantine et al. 1981). The document was prepared at the federal level and was not reviewed by District 7.

Work began on the landscaping project in the summer of 1983, and landscaping crews dug trenches into LAN-007, apparently including trespasses into El Pueblo State Historic Park. What appeared to be midden soil was uncovered in one of the trenches (Figure 3), and artifacts of Native American, Chinese, and European origin were uncovered. The impacts were noticed by both El Pueblo and Caltrans at about the same time: “This site is highly visible to passing traffic, well known in the Southern California archaeological community and adjacent to El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historic Park,” Webb observed in a Memorandum to File dated August 19, 1983. “This happening . . . could really get this Agency in trouble” (Webb 1983). But even after impacts were noted and a monitoring agreement worked out between Romani and the Caltrans landscaping team, digging continued without a monitor present.
Finally, El Pueblo de Los Angeles Park Director Jerry T. Smart complained about the situation to the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) on November 4, 1983. “We are asking you,” he wrote, “to invoke whatever emergency procedures are available within the Advisory Council regulations to prevent further destruction of this site and to mitigate the harm that has already been done.” Senior Curator Jean Bruce Poole also sent a copy of Smart’s letter to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

As a result of SHPO intervention, Caltrans agreed to conduct a test excavation to determine the horizontal and vertical extent of the site, the site’s integrity, and the site’s research potential (Caltrans 1984). John Romani would lead Caltrans in conducting the excavation, and Jay Frierman, on behalf of El Pueblo, would assist in artifact analysis (Bergen 1989). According to the excavation plan, a summary report would be completed within three months and a final report within six months of the completion of fieldwork (Caltrans 1984).

THE EXCAVATIONS

Caltrans conducted excavations from March 12 to April 13, 1984. Two loci were identified and explored (Figure 4). Locus 1 consisted of the area south of the on-ramp, at the northern tip of what is today El Pueblo’s Parking Lot No. 5. Two adjacent one-by-one-meter units (Units 1 and 2) and exploratory trenches were excavated in Locus 1. No features were identified in Locus 1, although Chinese, European, and Native American artifacts were recovered from Units 1 and 2.

Locus 2 is located north of the on-ramp, in the small area between the road and Father Serra Park. Two brick features, visible in looter’s pits, were explored in Locus 2. A deep one-by-one unit (Unit 3) was excavated beneath one of the brick features (Feature 1).

One of the brick features, which Caltrans designated Feature 2, was found to be a segment of the Zanja Madre. The zanja is Los Angeles’ original irrigation and water supply system; it was constructed by the Spanish but was maintained, improved, and expanded into the twentieth century (Gumprecht 1999; Layne 1957). The two exposures of this feature consisted of a brick conduit measuring 1.5 meters in exterior diameter. This was a portion of the same segment of the Zanja Madre that is exposed in the Avila Adobe interpretive center, which was uncovered by Julia Costello and Larry Wilcox in La Placita de Dolores, CA-LAN-887,
within the Los Angeles Plaza Historic District. The alignment possibly dates to the Spanish period, but the brick conduit was constructed in the 1880s (Costello and Wilcoxon 1978).

The other brick feature was a brick pavement, only a small portion of which was uncovered (Feature 1; Figure 5). Based on its location, this was identified as the paving of a portion of Ferguson Alley. The alley was blazed through Los Angeles' Chinatown in 1892. Romani excavated a one-by-one-meter test unit beneath this feature, which he designated Unit 3. It established 1892 as a *terminus ante quem* for the deposits beneath.

Unit 3 was well-placed. Excavations came down onto Feature 3, an ashy and artifact-rich deposit. The feature contained a wealth of Chinese ceramics and other items, including Chinese Overseas pottery sherds, opium pipe fragments, Asian coins, and game pieces. A smaller quantity of Native American artifacts, predominantly pottery but also including ground stone and an antler flaker, was also recovered from this deposit. The artifacts testify that the neighborhood’s reputation, both as a Chinatown and as a gambling area, was well-earned. This deposit was approximately 90 centimeters thick.

Approximately 30 centimeters beneath Feature 3, the remains of a structure constructed of redwood boards were encountered. This appears to have been the remains of a wood-lined privy. The Chinese, Euro-American, and Native American artifacts continued to the base of this feature, which was designated Feature 4.

Unit 3 was excavated to a total depth of approximately 3.1 meters below the original ground surface. Beneath Feature 4 was what appeared to be intact alluvium, and the artifact yield decreased dramatically.

*Figure 4. Two loci identified by Caltrans. Photo courtesy of the John F. Romani Archive, El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument.*
Frierman’s claim that sterile soil was never reached is a slight exaggeration; more or less sterile soil was encountered, and the deepest excavation extended beneath the floor of the privy that had itself been excavated deep below the contemporary ground surface and into natural alluvium.

**NATIVE AMERICAN ARTIFACTS**

The artifacts recovered from the excavation were only partially analyzed by Romani and Frierman, but everything except the unworked faunal bone was cataloged by Frierman’s assistant, Patricia Morse (Morse 1984). The catalog contains a total of 4,098 entries. I am currently going through the holdings at El Pueblo and analyzing the artifacts, and anticipate publishing a complete report. At this time, I can only offer preliminary remarks based on the artifact catalog and an analysis of the artifacts that have so far been relocated in El Pueblo’s holdings. For now I will focus particularly on the artifacts of Native American manufacture. Although all of the artifacts have been cataloged, Native American material consists of less than five percent of the cataloged artifacts. However, both Frierman in his brief published notice and Romani in his summary report focused on the site’s Native American component.

The Native American artifacts recovered included ground stone, a small amount of chipped stone, a hammerstone, a tarring pebble, one bead, two worked bones, one antler tine that likely served as a flaker, and one scraper manufactured from green bottle glass. Romani identified a slate artifact as a possible pendant (Romani 1997:10), but I have not seen this yet and, although the catalog documents two slate fragments, it does not identify them as pendants or even as worked items (Cat. No. 555X747). Most of the Native American artifacts were found either on the surface or in backhoe trench back dirt and therefore lack secure context. The possible tarring pebble was recovered from a backhoe trench in Locus 2 (Cat. No. 555X1386). The hammerstone was recovered from the Feature 2 Zanja Madre backfill (Cat. No. 555X1829). But a few of the artifacts were recovered from secure excavations. The possible flaker, one of the manos, and much of the pottery was even recovered from the Feature 3 privy.

The bead is an *Olivella* shell bead, 3 mm in diameter, with a tiny, straight perforation (Cat. No. 555X348). The bead is stained with asphaltum. These small beads are typical of the Late Period up until
contact (King 1990). The bead was recovered from back dirt, and the 1/8-inch screens and dry sieving conducted by Romani’s team would not have been likely to recover beads of this size in the controlled excavations.

The worked bone mentioned in Frierman’s publication consists of a bird long bone polished at both ends (Frierman 1992:26; Cat. No. 555X346). The bone is split longitudinally, probably an accidental breakage (Figures 6 and 7). Frierman identified this as a Canaliño whistle or flute (Frierman 1992:26) and in his unpublished notes he drew parallels to the flutes found at Diablo Canyon (CA-SLO-002), in Chumash territory (Greenwood 1972:36 and 95). However, unlike those flutes, this fragment does not exhibit any finger holes. The exact nature of this fragmentary artifact is unclear, and it is perhaps more likely a tubular bead or bone ornament, as Romani (1997:6) believed, than it is a flute.

Another piece of worked bone, identified as “Indian?” in the catalog, was recovered from 40-50 cm deep in Unit 3 (Cat. No. 555X2260). The interior is said to be polished and the exterior to be stained with asphaltum. It has not yet been relocated in the collection.

Eight manos or mano fragments were recovered. Seven were from the surface or fill in backhoe trenches (Cat. Nos. 555X310, 555X311, 555X352x 555X353, 555X354, 555X617, and 555X895). One mano fragment was encountered within the privy fill in Unit 3, at a depth of 170 to 180 cm (Cat. No. 555X3490). The antler tine flaker was encountered in the same unit and level (Cat. No. 555X3566).

Huey and Romani’s site form and subsequent documents relying on that site form mention a metate fragment at LAN-007 (Huey and Romani 1980). However, the handwritten Archaeological Field Catalog created in 1980 is in the Romani archive along with the site form. In that document the word “metate” is struck out and “bifacial mano” written in its stead (Caltrans 1980). There are no metate fragments in the artifact catalog (Morse 1984). It is most likely that no metates were ever recovered from the site, which may say something about how the ground stone was used or reused.

One possible chert core found on the surface (Cat. No. 555X609) and 13 chert, carnelian, and petrified wood artifacts, generally described as “detritus” or “chipping waste,” are noted in the catalog. One small chert tertiary flake—which is the only chipped stone from LAN-007 that I have examined myself—was recovered from Unit 2, at a depth of 60-70 cm (Cat. No. 555X4096). The remaining chipped stone artifacts, including seven chert pieces (Cat. Nos. 555X748, 555X799, 555X838, 555X866, 555X896, and 555X1172), four carnelian pieces (Cat. No. 555X885), and one object identified as “petrified wood?” (Cat. No. 555X837), were all recovered from depths of 20 cm to 90 cm in Unit 1. No chipped stone was recovered from anywhere in Locus 2.

Figure 6. Worked bird long bone exterior (Cat. No. 555X346).

Figure 7. Worked bird long bone interior (Cat. No. 555X346).
The green bottle glass scraper is an apparent example of Native Americans reshaping a probable Euro-American artifact for their own purposes (Cat. No. 555X392). The triangular scraper is heavily retouched on two sides to create working edges; the third side terminates with a snap fracture. The bottle glass scraper was, alas, recovered from backhoe trench back dirt (Figure 8).

In Frierman’s estimation, the recovery of Southern California Brown Ware ceramics from all levels of this stratified site was the most significant result of the excavation of LAN-007 (Frierman 1990). Frierman had done extensive research on Native American pottery in southern California. In particular, he studied it at sites such as the Ontiveros Adobe (CA-LAN-1016; Frierman 1982) and later the Aros-Serrano Adobe (CA-RIV-2778; Frierman 1987). He was also familiar with similar material from elsewhere in the El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historic District, such as the unpublished 1971 California State University, Northridge, excavations at the Plaza Church’s Padres’ House; the California State University, Long Beach, under-published Avila Adobe excavations (Munoz 1973); and the California State Parks equally under-published excavations of privies beneath the Hellman-Quon Building, also known as the Chinese Store (Frierman 1986; Lewis 1978). He used the term Southern California Brown Ware, a term he attributed to Gena Van Camp, which she used to differentiate Southern California’s prehistoric and historic indigenous pottery from that of Arizona but avoided the proliferation of dubious subcategories that threatened to appear in the 1970s and 1980s (Van Camp 1979).

Approximately 301 fragments of what is called Southern California Brown Ware are documented in the site catalog, from all contexts and depths. Brown Ware potsherds were found alongside Chinese brown-glazed stoneware, Chinese export pottery, and British ceramics. Unfortunately, only 26 of these Native American ceramic fragments have been located in the collection so far (Figure 9), and all of these are surface finds (Cat. Nos. 559-583). The 26 potsherds are fragments of paddle-and-anvil made pottery that resemble both Meighan’s description of Palomar Brown and Van Camp’s Southern California Brown Ware (Meighan 1959; Van Camp 1979).

Pottery is unusual if not rare at Gabrielino sites. In his 1852 letters to the Los Angeles Star newspaper, Hugo Reid famously stated that the Gabrielino did not make pottery and instead relied on soapstone vessels and baskets, some of the latter made waterproof with bitumen (Reid 1968:44-45). Archaeological studies have shown that at least some pottery was no doubt manufactured in Gabrielino territory (Koerper et al. 1978). Boxt and Dillon (2013) recently argued that pottery making was a Gabrielino tradition and identified 38 archaeological sites in Gabrielino territory from which pottery was recovered. However, their list includes all pottery, including imported Southwestern pottery and figurine fragments. Even the archaeological site at which they identified the greatest number of sherds, CA-LAN-2630, from which 642 sherds were recovered, contained fragments from only an estimated 10 to 12 vessels, and nearby archaeological sites yielded no
ceramics. By contrast, in her study of Kumeyaay pottery, Van Camp (1979:27) noted that more than 300 of the 700 Kumeyaay sites documented by the San Diego Museum of Man are pottery sites.

One can contrast LAN-007 with nearby LAN-1575, located a few hundred feet to the east. In contrast with the 301 sherds recovered from LAN-007, much more extensive excavations yielded only three potsherds from the Native American cemetery at CA-LAN-1575 and 25 sherds from historic privies at the site (Griset 1999). More basketry than pottery was recovered from the cemetery.

The Chinese Store excavations and the LAN-007 excavations, Frierman argued, indicated that California Brown Ware manufacture took place in Los Angeles well into the American period, continuing as late as the 1870s or even the 1880s. This would mean that Angelenos were making pottery resembling Tizon Brown Ware almost right up until the time Tizon Brownware manufacture was abandoned in the Southwest (Clauss 2001).

LAN-007 is often described in the literature as a prehistoric site that also has Chinese remnants. It cannot be described as such, at least on the basis of current knowledge. Although artifacts of Native American manufacture are found at the stratified site, all these artifacts are found in association with historic artifacts. The Native American pottery is likely a sign that the pottery makers were Native American but likely were not Gabrielino but had come to Los Angeles from areas with a more robust ceramic tradition.

SITE IDENTIFICATION AND HISTORY

Both Romani and Frierman identified LAN-007 as the remains of the Rancheria de los Poblanos. This was a multi-ethnic workers’ village established in 1836 on the outskirts of the pueblo for the Native Americans who came flooding into Los Angeles following the secularization of the missions. It was razed in 1845 and the people relocated to the east side of the Los Angeles River. The land was soon sold to Johannes Groningen, a German immigrant who was known in Los Angeles as Juan Domingo and who owned a vineyard adjacent to the rancheria. The northern limits of Groningen’s vineyard did extend to Aliso Street. However, it seems unlikely that the notoriously overcrowded reservation was located so close to the plaza. Moreover, according
to W. W. Robinson, probably the best authority on land in California, the settlement was located southwest of today’s intersection of Alameda Street and Commercial Street (Robinson 1938, 1952:16-17). That would place it approximately 0.25 mile southeast of LAN-007.

LAN-007 is located just opposite Los Angeles Street and southeast of the Los Angeles’ Mexican period Plaza. The Plaza was established about 1818. At least by the late Mexican period, the road known as El Calle de los Negros occupied today’s Los Angeles Street. How the street got such an odd name is open to question, but it is almost certainly not named after people of African descent, or at least not directly. In the first United States census, 1850, there were only 34 people who identified as “colored” and 11 as “mulatto” in the entirety of Los Angeles County (Newmark and Newmark 1929); and at that time the county was much larger than today. It is not clear that any of them lived around the plaza. Historian Michael J. Gonzalez may be correct in suggesting that the street is named not for Africans, but for dark-skinned people—i.e., Native Americans (Gonzalez 2005; Lopez 2012).

It is certain that by the end of the Mexican period and the beginning of the American period, many Native Americans lived in the vicinity. Native Americans provided much of the domestic labor in the pueblo. Excavations at the Avila Adobe appear to show archaeologically Native Americans preparing food in traditional fashion (Munoz 1973). They also worked in the vineyards and fields that occupied the floodplains south and east of the plaza. El Calle de los Negros was a major entrance to the pueblo from the south and would seem an obvious place for these fieldworkers to live.

For a number of reasons, it is difficult to associate individuals mentioned in the old censuses with places. The Mexican census of 1836 lumps all Yndios together at the end of the document, so it is unclear where they lived. Street names were fluid in the old pueblo, and house numbers nonexistent, so the first American census similarly had no landmarks by which to interpret it spatially. Moreover, the American census workers, who were supposed to indicate an individual’s race, appear to not always differentiate between Native Americans and the mestizo Californios. However, one entry in the United States census appears to confirm that many Native Americans lived along the Calle. The Coronel adobe stood at the north end of the Calle. It was one of the first adobes built along the plaza, and it remained in the Coronel family for decades, long into the American period. In the 1850 census, in addition to nine family members and a Mexican laborer, Ignacio Coronel has six Indian servants from California listed in his household. Five were males ranging in age from seven to 37, and the sixth was an 11-year-old female. Coronel’s home remained a landmark on the Calle as a new ethnic group, the Chinese, took over the area, and it became one of the scenes where the 1871 Chinese Massacre played out.

Many of the Native Americans who might have lived along the Calle were not Gabrielinos. After the secularization of the missions in 1834, as the mission lands fell into private hands, Native Americans flooded into Los Angeles (Gonzales 2005; Phillips 2010; Hackel 2012). The list of Los Yndios in the 1836 census includes 252 Native Americans (Table 1). Only 100 are said to have originated at Angeles. Others came from San Diego, San Luis Rey, and even Baja and Yuma (Layne 1936). These individuals came from tribes and areas with robust pottery-making traditions, explaining the abundance of Southern California Brown Ware at LAN-007.

The portion of LAN-007 that Romani sampled in 1984 includes several historic parcels. An 1873 Map of the Old Portion of the City Surrounding the Plaza identifies the landowners who patented the land according to the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, and so informs us who owned the land in the 1850s (Ruxton 1873). Romani’s test units were on lands owned by IGNACIO DEL VALLE, MARIA PAGAREA, MARIA BALLESTERO, JUAN APABLASA, SERAFINA URBIDA, and possibly JOSE VINCENTE DE GUERRERO (Figure 10).

When American railroad surveyors passed through Los Angeles in 1853, Ignacio del Valle’s adobe stood at the southeast corner of the plaza, approximately where the northwest portion of LAN-007 is situated. Maria Ballestero is listed on the same lot as del Valle. A small building stood east of del Valle’s adobe facing Alameda Street; it was called La Tienda dela Covacha, where sweets were sold to the Native Americans (de Packman 1944).
Table 1. “Los Yndios” in the 1836 Los Angeles Census (from Layne 1936).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angeles</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gentil</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego</td>
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<tr>
<td>San Luis</td>
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<td>Baja</td>
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<td>San Gabriel</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuma</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Juan</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caneigo</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cahuilla</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agua Caliente, Cayego, Floris, Isleño, San Felipe, Yaqua</td>
<td>1 each</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 10. Approximate location of CA-LAN-007 noting historic landowners (from Ruxton 1873). Image publicly accessible at https://hdl.huntington.org/digital/collection/p15150coll4/id/12899/rec/10.
South of Del Valle’s home was the property of Juan Apablasa, who came to California at an unknown date but appears in the 1836 census working as a tavern keeper (Layne 1936). By 1850, he had a net wealth of $2,000. In addition to his own family, that of a Joaquin Feliz lived in Apablasa’s household in 1850. They were from California, but if they were Native American it is not so noted (Newmark and Newmark 1929).

Apablasa went on to become one of the main landlords of Chinatown. The first Chinese community to come to Los Angeles settled in the area around the plaza, probably because the aging adobes were already being rented out (presumably cheaply) to Native American workers. The Chinese population grew exponentially as the nineteenth century waned, from two in 1850 to 1,871 in 1890, two years before Ferguson Alley sealed the deposits in Unit 3. They took both the homes and the jobs of the Native American population, becoming Los Angeles’ domestic workers and agriculturalists. When Roberta Greenwood excavated Old Chinatown at CA-LAN-1575, she excavated remains along Apablasa Street (Greenwood 1996). The area that Greenwood excavated was a newer extension of Old Chinatown, which had its origins in the vicinity of LAN-007.

A LONG FORGETTING

At the time of Romani’s excavations, everyone accepted that LAN-007 was eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Even before the excavations, El Pueblo Senior Curator Jean Bruce Poole wrote, “We feel that the materials found after the workmen had done their digging without its having been properly monitored, are of such significance that the site should be declared as eligible for the National Register” (Poole 1983). Following his excavations, John Romani recommended, “On the basis of the site’s demonstrated integrity, depth, and data potential, CA-LAN-7/H is clearly eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places under criteria a, c, and d” (Romani 1997:21). Correspondence in the El Pueblo archives suggests that the involved agencies concurred with this finding of significance. In a letter to Caltrans, El Pueblo de Los Angeles State Historic Park General Manager Jerald K. Lee wrote, “I am sure that you are aware that this excavation is worthy of National Register designation.” In a letter written in response and dated June 11, 1984, Caltrans Senior Environmental Planner Jeffery C. Bingham agreed, “The information recovered from this test is adequate for determining the site’s eligibility to the National Register of Historic Places.” Two pages of a draft letter dated October 31, 1988, from the City of Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department to State Historic Preservation Officer Kathryn Gualtieri, are preserved at the end of the version of Romani’s draft report given to me by John M. Foster. They indicate that the City concurred with the site’s eligibility, and made the claim that an appropriate interpretive center would contribute to the site (perhaps as part of the mitigation) (Romani 1997:back matter).

In the years following the excavations, both Romani and Frierman continued to analyze the excavation findings. Frierman’s assistant, Patricia Morse, cataloged the finds between February and September 1984 (Morse 1984). Frierman made notes of artifact parallels that survive in the papers at UCLA. He also prepared exhibit proposals. One proposal was for a research collection of Chinese household wares and tools recovered from LAN-007 to be displayed at the Chinese American Museum (Frierman n.d.). When that museum finally opened, after Frierman’s death, it would have no such exhibit.

A more ambitious project involved the creation of an interpretive archaeological exhibit at LAN-007 itself. Frierman proposed clearing the area around the Zanja, protecting the Zanja under glass, and landscaping the surroundings with native riparian woodland vegetation. He also proposed reopening Unit 3 and extending it, creating a two-by-three-meter excavation. A roofed structure with glass walls would protect the site while allowing visitors to peer into the open excavation. A conceptual sketch (Figure 11) commissioned by Frierman and prepared by architect Fred Rochlin shows a structure larger than, but similar to, structures that can be seen today around excavations at the Ontiveros Adobe site (CA-LAN-1016) in Heritage Park in Santa Fe Springs (Figure 12), where Frierman also worked (Frierman 1982). Exhibits of representative artifacts would grace the interpretive center and illustrate “the polyglot community that has occupied the site, Indian, Spanish, Mexican, Chinese, Anglo, as well as a history of the adjacent Calle de los Negros” (Frierman 1988).
Frierman’s pursuit of funding for this project was a prelude to the termination of Caltrans’ commitment to the project. Frierman appealed to the SHPO for financial support to fund the interpretative center and Caltrans to fund the final report. Frierman requested $10,000 to complete the report, which would include $2,000 for Neutrino Activation Analysis studies of the indigenous pottery.

Caltrans voiced support for the project in a letter to the SHPO and offered to help with the permitting of the interpretive center (Bingham 1988), but refused financial support for the report. After a meeting with Frierman, a senior Caltrans official wrote a Memo to File. It is signed only with a monogram but appears to have been written by Senior Environmental Planner Franklyn J. Bergen. “I don’t think we are yet in agreement on what needs to be done. Jay is talking about considerable further research . . . Caltrans wants a report written reflecting the facts of the excavation and the analysis completed to date . . . Further research is always possible . . . [but] I question the appropriateness of funding this research with public money” (Bergen 1989).

The same day, Bergen wrote to Romani. Romani left Caltrans sometime in the late 1980s but remained interested in the project. He may have retained notes on the excavations and clearly intended to finish a report. Bergen informed him that, “All of the materials pertaining to the investigation of LAn-7, including originals of field notes, sketches and photos, as well as any artifactual materials, are the property...
of the State of California . . . Their prompt return to me at the Caltrans District Office is hereby requested” (Bergen 1989). Copies of this letter are in El Pueblo’s business papers and the Frierman papers, and it is likely that Frierman and El Pueblo pushed Bergen to write the letter. It is unclear what effect this letter had, other than likely alienating Romani from the others.

Subsequent meetings between Caltrans and El Pueblo took place in the early 1990s but apparently went nowhere. As late as December 24, 1991, Frierman and El Pueblo curator Robyn Cummins planned to complete the report together, with “someone else” analyzing the faunal bone. Romani is notably absent from the proposed list of report authors (Anonymous 1991).

Fortunately for posterity, Caltrans archaeologist Jack Hunter came into possession of the excavation photos and documentation and passed them back to Romani sometime after 1992. Romani finally completed his *Summary of Caltrans 1984 Phase II Archaeological Excavation at a Portion of CA-LAN-7/H* in 1997. In what appears to be a very clever way of funding the project, a cover page in the Romani archive indicates that the document was prepared while Romani was in the employ of Science Applications International Corporation, and the document was prepared for Pacific Pipeline Systems, Inc., and L. W. Reed Consultants. It was presented as part of the Pacific Pipeline System Emidio—Los Angeles Pipeline Segments 3 and 4 project’s Archaeological and Native American Monitoring Information Packet. When Romani completed the summary report, he had a copy of Morse’s catalog but apparently no access to the artifacts, and his report described the site and its features but included only cursory mention of the artifacts. Nevertheless,

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Figure 12. Ontiveros Adobe (CA-LAN-1016) refuse deposit interpretive display, Heritage Park, Santa Fe Springs. Photo courtesy of M. Beherec.
the 23-page document is the most comprehensive presentation of the excavation results to date. It appears not to have been widely disseminated. It was not filed with Caltrans or the SCCIC.

If Frierman or Romani had any plans to publish the results of the excavations more widely, they did not do so. Frierman died in 1998, and his widow, Beatrice, donated his papers to UCLA in 2001 (Salvano 2010). Romani died in 2011 (Sampson 2012). His widow, Gwen, also an archaeologist, donated the LAN-007 papers to El Pueblo in 2017; Gwen Romani passed away in 2018.

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

In 1984, an inadvertent impact to LAN-007 led to the excavation of test units and backhoe trenches at the site, overseen by John Romani. These investigations revealed a brick pavement, a segment of the brick Zanja Madre, and a privy. The site, especially the privy, yielded a wealth of Chinese artifacts and some Native American artifacts, most abundantly indigenous pottery. Exclusive of pottery, almost all of the Native American artifacts were recovered from Locus 2, and most of the indigenous artifacts recovered from controlled excavations were recovered from Unit 1. Although a comprehensive analysis of the artifacts remains to be completed, and the meaning of the relative abundance of chipped stone in Unit 1 remains to be worked out, every indication at this stage of investigation is that LAN-007 is a historic site and, possibly all, of the material there dates to the American period, after a multi-ethnic community of Native Americans had established themselves as Los Angeles’ labor force, and as Chinese were moving into what became Old Chinatown.

After the excavations, there was not follow-up either by those who had taken part in or those who visited the excavations, but surviving members of the excavation team are fewer and fewer as the years pass. Occasionally, the excavations are mentioned in the gray literature, usually only to show frustration that the results of the excavations were never released. What was found went largely undocumented, and Romani’s summary report, prepared more than a decade after the excavations, was not filed with the SCCIC and apparently not widely distributed. The results of the archaeological excavations at this site, which every agency involved recognized was eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, have been largely denied to the archaeological community, and especially those of us who were not active in the 1980s, for 35 years.

I filed Romani’s summary report and Morse’s catalog (along with Fenenga’s volume and about a dozen other archaeological technical reports related to El Pueblo) with the SCCIC in March 2019. As long as the California Historical Resources Information System continues to exist, the excavation will not be forgotten again. I am also working with El Pueblo to complete an analysis of the LAN-007 artifacts in their possession. The results of Romani’s important work deserve to be better known and should be considered in our understanding of the development of Los Angeles.

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