FIELD RESULTS AND HISTORICAL PERIOD ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT IN DOWNTOWN REDLANDS, CALIFORNIA

SCOTT D. SUNELL
STATISTICAL RESEARCH, INC., REDLANDS, CALIFORNIA

During the Downtown Redlands Archaeological Project in 2019 and 2020, Statistical Research, Inc. (SRI) identified more than 400 individual features during excavations at CA-SBR-5314H. These features represent a wide range of past behaviors, from household food preparation to industrial scale pipe production. We interpret these archaeological contexts in light of the archival and oral history records presented by Ciolek-Torello et al. [2020] and Grenda et al. [2020]. South of the railroad, features were characterized by a narrow range of material types, and suggest primarily adult men engaged in food preparation, clothing maintenance, and leisure/recreational activities. North of the railroad, features are more complex, deeper, and individually richer. Features in this area suggest either residential occupation by families, with multiple large, well-stratified privies (and similarly rich trash pits) near historically attested houses, or industrial waste dumping, primarily in the form of metal scrap and construction debris. We focus on the spatial organization of features, the major patterns of site use through time, and the probable activities tied to the creation of the features. This article bridges the historical records of ethnic Chinese and Mexican communities in this part of Redlands with the archaeological evidence recovered by SRI, providing context for the analysis of artifacts across the site, addressing sociopolitical status and community structure.

The portion of CA-SBR-5314H excavated by Statistical Research, Inc. (SRI) during the Downtown Redlands Archaeological Project in 2019 and 2020 yielded large amounts of archaeological evidence about historical period life at the western edge of downtown Redlands, California. The overwhelming number of features (excluding those with no associated artifacts that could be analyzed, n = 383) precluded analyzing everything recovered. As a result, we sampled 28 percent of our features for analysis (n = 106). Our sample emphasized features associated with residential occupation due to their richness and potential to address questions about the communities that lived within our project area (see Grenda et al. 2020). Our first completed analysis of one class of artifacts from this assemblage is presented in Ciolek-Torello et al. (2020).

Our excavations captured three general types of features: a widespread set of commercial/industrial features, which included evidence of the development of the city, of the citrus packing industry, and of the automobile transportation revolution; and two distinct sets of residential features distinguished from one another spatially by the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe (AT&SF) railroad tracks, temporally into the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries versus the mid-twentieth century, and culturally by ethnic affiliation attested in historical documents. This article reviews the site context for our excavations, followed by the types of features we encountered during fieldwork.

CA-SBR-5314H AND SRI’S “SITES”

SRI’s excavations occurred in four areas within CA-SBR-5314H, referred to as Sites 1 through 4 (Figure 1). Sites 1, 2, and 4 are north of the railroad tracks, between the tracks and Stuart Avenue. Site 3 is south of Site 1, between the railroad tracks and Oriental Street. Below, I briefly review the locations of each site. These site numbers are not official designations, and refer only to the parcels themselves to distinguish among them for the purpose of context during fieldwork and analysis. The property lines have been in use since the nineteenth century with only minor alterations, so these designations are archaeologically relevant for the purpose of describing the context of each area.
Figure 1. Map of Sites 1 through 4, showing historical structures relative to project area boundaries (in yellow).

Our “sites” are therefore treated as loci within CA-SBR-5314H, because each of these excavated parcels has a unique history of use since the late nineteenth century. Historic Sanborn fire insurance maps and AT&SF railroad maps indicate mixed industrial and residential use through time. Areas of residential occupation yielded the highest density of features, especially on Sites 1 through 3. Fortunately, even as these communities were displaced by commercial development, most of the later construction did not include deep subsurface disturbances for basements or foundations. Large numbers of cultural features spanning the past 140 years survived as a result, with the exception of the eastern two-thirds of Site 4. This area was subject to commercial development much earlier than the rest of the sites, and fewer residential features were present as a result (see Figure 1). Each site is described in detail below.

Site 1

The earliest Sanborn maps that include the area of Site 1 date to the first decades of the twentieth century. This site is defined by West Stuart Avenue on the north, Eureka Street on the east, and the AT&SF railroad on the south. The 1915 map shows a row of small dwellings on the eastern two-thirds of the site (along the railroad tracks), while the Elephant Orchards packing house occupied the western third of the site. Over time, these residences were pushed further west as the packing house expanded to include box storage and manufacturing. By the 1930s, the packing house was gone, although the box storage (now a materials and auto wrecking yard) continued to operate. Houses on the eastern portion of the site stood until the twenty-first century, including that of the Lopez family at 525 West Stuart (cousins of the Morales family at 607 West Stuart) (Shea 2019). Site 1 contained 147 residential features, exclusive of trash scatters.
Site 2

Site 2 is defined by West Stuart Avenue on the north, Eureka Street on the west, and the AT&SF railroad on the south. The Redlands Iron Pipe Works, in operation by 1892, was located at the present-day southeast corner of West Stuart Avenue and Eureka Street. Its footprint covered nearly the entire site area, but it did not include a basement and was moved after 1900. The remains of one large foundation were present, made of poured concrete set atop large, natural granite boulders taken from the natural sediment at the site (Figure 2). This foundation originally supported a tar kettle, dipping furnace, and hoisting crane that were used to produce large-diameter irrigation pipes for orange groves and water conveyances in and around Redlands. By 1915, the entire area contained “Numerous Mexican Shanties” according to the Sanborn map, but these were not mapped individually. Beginning from the 1930s, the site was used as a contractor’s materials yard and auto wrecking yard, before laying empty during the latter part of the twentieth century. Site 2 contained 57 residential features, exclusive of trash scatters.

Site 3

Site 3 was occupied earlier than Sites 1 and 2, and saw a different history of use as a result. Site 3 is defined by the AT&SF railroad on the north, Eureka Street on the east, and Oriental Avenue on the south. The westernmost third of Site 3 encompassed large, permanent brick-built apartments in what was then
Redlands’ Chinatown (CA-SBR-5314H). From the 1880s to the turn of the twentieth century, no other buildings are known to have existed on Site 3. Between 1900 and 1908, however, the Euroamerican-owned White Star Laundry (later Redlands Laundry Co.) opened a large building in the eastern half of Site 3, aimed at putting the Chinese-owned laundries out of business, which had previously been forced into a small section of town nearby (Brock et al. 1988:7; Citrograph 1892; Padon and Swope 1997). This operation was itself not long-lived, however.

At the same time, Chinatown declined in size over the first two decades of the century (the end of the Chinese community in Redlands came in the early 1920s; Harry Lee, reputedly the last vegetable seller who operated in Redlands, died in 1938 [San Bernardino County Sun 1938]). By 1915, the laundry had been replaced by oil storage for the Union Oil Co., a few years later joined by Shell Oil. The Chinatown apartments stood until the middle of the twentieth century, eventually replaced by 1938 with a single dwelling at the northwest corner of Eureka Street and Oriental Avenue and an auto wrecking yard along the tracks. Over the latter half of the twentieth century, the oil storage yards would be replaced, and the entire site was occupied by auto wrecking and repair businesses. Site 3 contained 39 residential features, exclusive of trash scatters.

Site 4

Site 4 is defined by the property boundary separating it from Site 2 on the west, by West Stuart Avenue on the north, and the edge of the parcel with the current address of 31 West Stuart Avenue on the east (the current property line between 31 and 21 West Stuart). The extension of Sylveria (currently 3rd) Street extends through the project area, dividing 31 West Stuart from the portion to the east (see Figure 1). Unlike Sites 1 through 3, very little evidence of subsurface residential features was identified within Site 4. Commercial development in this area began prior to 1900, and no subsurface features were identified in these areas on either side of 3rd Street, aside from modern pipes laid within the road (including plastic gas lines). Further west, where early twentieth century records indicate some houses were built (contemporary with the occupation on Site 2), a small number of features was recorded. Site 4 contained 29 residential features, exclusive of trash scatters.

FEATURE TYPES

The majority of the features SRI identified during fieldwork were unlined trash pits associated with residential occupation. In order to evaluate the huge assemblage within these four sites, we sampled only well-preserved residential features for analysis. As a result, our ongoing analysis focuses primarily on trash pits and privy pits that contained information that was most suitable for archaeological analysis. These pits varied in their depths, in the complexity of their internal stratigraphy, in the density of their contents, and in the proportions of various materials within them. SRI identified three types of trash features: scatters, pits, and privies.

Trash scatters are those features in which spatially discrete concentrations of artifacts were discovered, but for which no evidence of a pit could be identified. These features tend to be small, often contain limited numbers of artifacts, and are relatively shallow. These features do not contribute to our understanding of the broader patterns of site use due to their minimal contents and ephemeral context, and as a result they were excluded from our analysis.

Trash pits are distinguished from scatters by the presence of an identifiable pit edge and a change in feature soil recognized during excavation. Pits are defined generally by rounded bottoms, sloping sides, and irregular shapes in plan view (although usually round or elliptical). These were the most diverse types of features recorded by SRI during this project. As a result, they were further divided into three subtypes: sparse (Figure 3), dense (Figure 4), and complex (Figure 5). Sparse pits contained low densities of trash in a single stratum. Dense pits contained high densities of domestic refuse (e.g., kitchen trash, bottle fragments).
Figure 3. The bisected profile of Feature 1421, a sparse trash pit.

Figure 4. The bisected profile of Feature 1349, a dense trash pit.
Complex pits contained multiple internal strata, but their shape and overall depth distinguished them from privies. We could have classified either dense or sparse pits as “complex”; in practice, however, all of the trash pits with multiple strata were categorized as dense.

Privy pits are pits dug as receptacles for human waste and are characterized by extremely complex internal stratigraphy and/or straight sides with generally flat bottoms. In our project areas, slumping of the sandy sediment often led to bell-shaped pits as a result of cleaning and reuse (e.g., Feature 1254; Figure 6). None of the privies were lined, and so far, our analysis suggests that they were used for relatively brief periods before being abandoned. Some of the privies identified during this project (e.g., Privy 2183) were apparently cleaned out and reused in multiple phases, but at successively shallower depths. Glass bottle analysis of Privy 2183, for example, places its period of use between 1900 and 1930, with a possible range between 1915 and 1920. These dates support the evidence from the historic Sanborn maps, which indicate residential occupation near that privy during that interval.

SRI excavated and is currently analyzing other features that were defined individually by their uses, such as ovens, foundations, and pipe trenches. The largest individual features were foundations for various historically attested structures: the Redlands Iron Pipe Works dipping furnace (Site 2; Figure 2); the Elephant Orchards packing house (Site 1; Figure 7); and the Chinatown apartments/Redlands Laundry Co. (Site 3; Figures 8 and 9). Two brick-lined ovens were identified at Site 3 in association with the apartment foundations, and an in-ground wooden 10,000-gallon tank was identified at the eastern boundary of Site 4 (Figure 10).

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXT**

The history of these sites cannot be reduced simply to a sequence of structures, landowners, and businesses. The archaeological record recovered during SRI’s work demonstrates the ways in which this thinking elides the experiences of the communities that lived on both sides of the tracks.
Figure 6. The bisected profile of Feature 1254, a privy pit.

Figure 7. Foundations of the Elephant Orchards packing house at Site 1, at the corner of West Stuart and Eureka.
Figure 8. Foundations of the Chinatown apartments (Feature 3140) at Site 3.

Figure 9. Foundations of the White Star Laundry building during excavation (Feature 3481) at Site 3.
The poorly consolidated, sandy soil suggests that none of the unlined pits could have been in active use for extended periods of time. Use-lives for all such unlined features would have necessarily been short, particularly in the case of deep, straight-sided privies. The absence of foundations or evidence of permanent outhouses further supports this argument. As a result, the spatial patterns evident in these pits provide an opportunity to identify likely locations for unmapped wooden structures, and temporal control of pit contents may yield detailed data concerning the timing of occupation/use.

While large quantities of nondiagnostic glass fragments, bundles of wire, and rusted masses of nails characterize much of the material identified at these sites in the field, we recovered substantial numbers of embossed medicine bottles (both patent and prescription), metal artifacts (e.g., animal tack, household maintenance hardware), ceramics (e.g., food storage containers), and other items that will allow us to identify patterns of likely ethnic affiliation.

Features south of the railroad tracks contained significant quantities of artifacts associated with ethnic Chinese communities elsewhere in California’s Inland Empire (i.e., Riverside, San Bernardino) and in North America more broadly. These include imported Chinese ceramics (Chinese Brown Glazed Stoneware [CBGS] and porcelain service vessels), glass Chinese medicine vials, and other artifacts (e.g., Chinese glass gaming pieces).

North of the tracks, significant numbers of Gebhardt Chili powder bottles and “La Sanadora” patent medicine bottles suggest a significantly different occupational history, evident in the archaeological expressions...
of foodways and health practices. These features correspond to historical twentieth century north of the tracks, which eventually extended to Site 3 south of the tracks between ca. 1925 and 1938. Historical documents, census records, and oral history all confirm the presence of an ethnic Mexican neighborhood, which nevertheless included families and individuals of other ethnic affiliations, throughout much of the twentieth century (Shea 2019).

CONCLUSION

Our analysis is ongoing for the Downtown Redlands Archaeological Project, and this article presents an overview of the historical and archaeological site contexts and the archaeological features excavated. Ciolek-Torello et al. (2020) presented the first completed analysis of this assemblage, providing a preview of the kind of interpretation we hope to produce as a result of our ongoing work on these important archaeological resources. Following the research design presented in Grenda et al. (2020), we plan to extend this type of analysis to include artifacts related to subsistence strategies, health and medicinal practices, socioeconomic status, and similar topics.

REFERENCES CITED


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