

# ANALYSIS OF HISTORIC CERAMIC HOUSEHOLD ARTIFACTS AT LOS PEÑASQUITOS RANCH HOUSE, SAN DIEGO COUNTY

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*Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve is one of the most important historic areas in San Diego County, containing 68 recorded archaeological sites. One site, the Los Peñasquitos Ranch House Complex (CA-SDI-8125/5220), has been the focus of numerous archaeological and architectural investigations since 1980. In 2010, the Palomar College Department of Behavioral Sciences Archaeology Division began conducting archaeological test excavations in the field and knoll areas adjacent to the Ranch House. Between September 2010 and December 2019, the students in the Palomar College Archaeological Field School excavated 75 units in those two locations to identify historic activity areas and structures. In the fall of 2021, Palomar College students analyzed various historic artifacts to incorporate into a report submitted by Palomar College to the County of San Diego Department of Parks and Recreation. This article presents the results of the analysis of historic ceramic household artifacts found in the vicinity of the Los Peñasquitos Ranch House.*

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE LOS PEÑASQUITOS ADOBE

Ranching has been an integral part of San Diego County's history for over 200 years from the time the Spanish padres arrived in the middle to late eighteenth century. Traces of that history are still visible on the landscape in the form of adobe buildings at many locations throughout the county. One notable San Diego County ranch features a still-standing adobe dating from 1823. Los Peñasquitos (Rancho Santa María de los Peñasquitos) is located within a county park in what is now Rancho Peñasquitos and served as a center of cattle ranching operations for multiple families, as a stop on the overland trail from Mexico and Arizona that became the first public highway, and as a way station on the first mail route in California. By the 1960s, the ranch was defunct, and the adobe had fallen into disrepair. Only a few of the associated buildings remain, but the adobe has now been restored and serves as a museum and event space within the park.

## CERAMIC ARTIFACT CLASSIFICATION

Historic ceramics of the nineteenth century are classified into two categories: kitchen/dining use and nonfood household use. Kitchen or dining ceramics, the most common, "are those items used in preparing, serving, eating, drinking, and storing food" and can be further classified as either tableware or utilitarian vessels (Walter 2011:2). Tableware comprises vessels used for serving, eating, or drinking, and includes such items as plates, bowls, teacups, and serving dishes. Utilitarian vessels are "used for food, but not for its direct consumption," such as items used for food storage (Walter 2011:2). Nonfood household ceramics include "chamber pots, ewers, wash basins and soap dishes, utilitarian items like flowerpots and cuspidors, and decorative items such as vases" (Walter 2011:2). For the purpose of this analysis, only kitchen/dining objects and some nonfood household ceramics were evaluated.

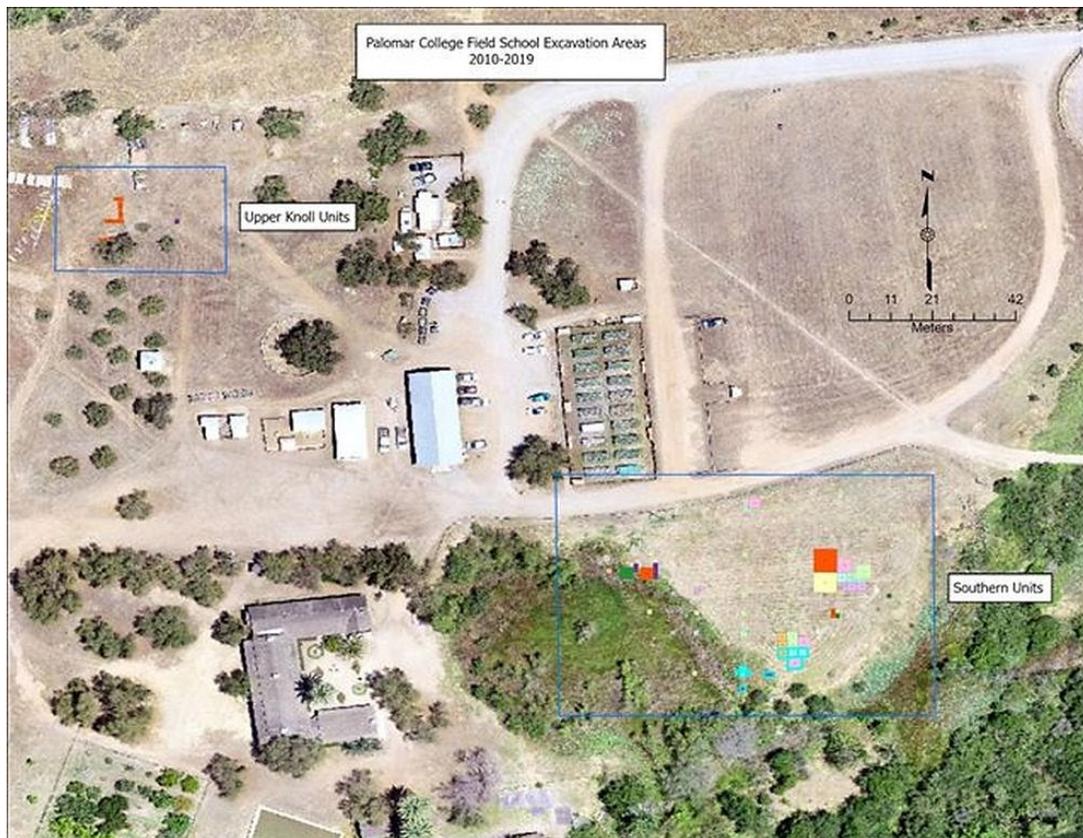


Figure 1. Palomar College field school excavation areas, 2010-2019.

## PALOMAR COLLEGE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS: 2010-2019

Archaeological excavations at Los Peñasquitos have been ongoing since the 1980s (Figure 1). The artifacts used in this analysis are from excavations undertaken by the students in the Palomar College Archaeological Excavation class between 2010 and 2019. Of the 75 units that have been excavated during this time period, 67 are located in an open field to the east of the Johnson-Taylor adobe where a barn, corrals, a sheep dip, and various other outbuildings once stood, referred to hereafter as “the Field.” An additional eight excavation units are located on “the Knoll,” where a possible bunkhouse once stood, north of the adobe and beyond the large cistern. The largest concentrations of historic ceramic artifacts have been recovered from Unit 48 ( $n = 20$ ), which is thought to be part of a trash dump area, and from the Knoll within units being excavated around possible foundation features of the bunkhouse (Units 71 and 75;  $n = 21$ ). The remaining excavated ceramic artifacts are from throughout the entire excavation area, with generally fewer than 10 ceramic artifacts recovered from any given unit.

## DATA AND RESULTS

The Los Peñasquitos collection yielded 183 verified historic ceramic artifacts. All ceramic household artifacts were classified by ware type, decoration, vessel part, vessel shape, and inferred vessel use, and

artifact counts were conducted to identify possible patterns in the data. The total number of historic ceramic artifacts were counted by unit. Those units with no historic ceramics (or the artifacts were missing from the collection) were removed from the data table (Figure 2). The artifacts were then counted by ware type to determine whether one type was predominant in the collection (Figure 3). Vessel parts of the artifacts were also counted, despite 68% of the collection being made up of small, undecorated fragments with no discernable vessel features (Figure 4). Finally, because decorated vessels account for only approximately 17% of the collection, decorated vessels were classified by ware type to determine if the distribution was similar to the collection as a whole (Figure 5).

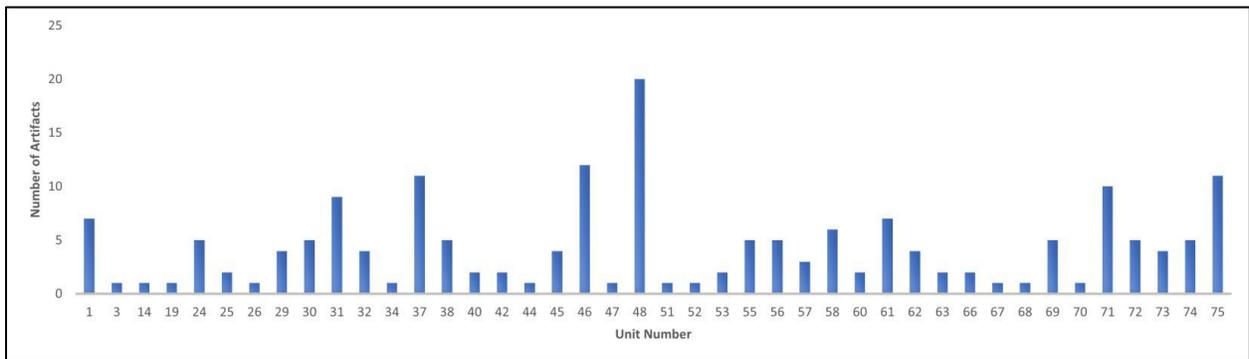


Figure 2. Historic ceramic artifact count per unit.

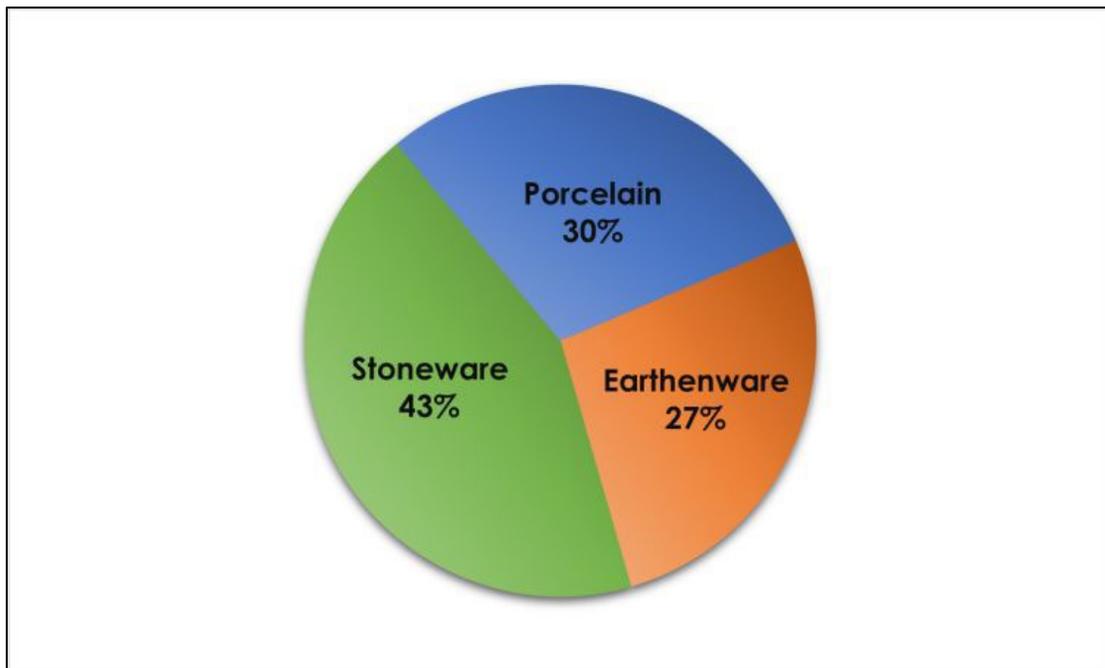


Figure 3. Percentage of collection by ware type.

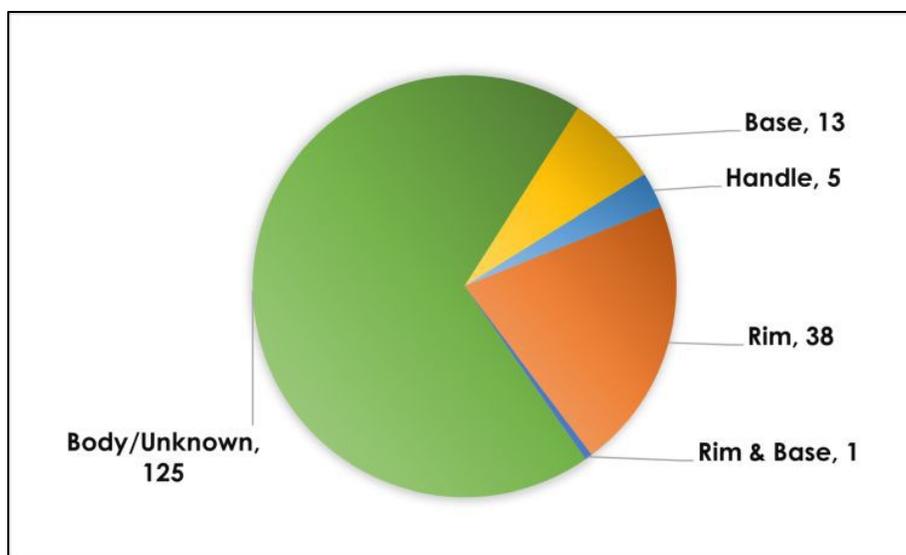


Figure 4. Artifact count by vessel part.



Figure 5. Decorated artifacts by ware type.

Following the method used by Susan Walter for the ceramic analysis included in Van Wormer and Walter (2011), the Los Peñasquitos ceramic artifacts were organized into the following categories: Native American Wares, Hispanic Wares, Chinese Stoneware, and Euro-American Wares (Walter 2011). The latter category is further broken down into the following subcategories: Undecorated, Hand Painted Polychrome, Spongeware, Banded Ware, Edge Decorated, Transferware (with the additional subcategories of Black, Blue, Flow Blue, Mulberry, and Other Colors), Molded White Ironstone, Porcelain, Copper Luster, Decal Decorated, and Marks. Native American Wares and Hispanic Wares were not included in this analysis; however, an additional category, Euro-American Stoneware, was added. Other categories excluded from this analysis including games/toys, garments, building materials, and any artifacts labeled “terra cotta.” Each of the aforementioned categories was noted as being present or absent at each of the Los Peñasquitos excavation locations (Table 1) and is described below in more detail.

### **Euro-American Stoneware**

Approximately 14 sherds of this type were found, only one of which came from the Knoll; the remainder came from the Field (Figure 6).

Table 1. Presence (+) or Absence (-) of Ware Types Found during Excavations at Los Peñasquitos Adobe.

Type of Ware	Location	
	Field	Knoll
Chinese Stoneware	-	-
Euro-American Stoneware	+	+
Euro-American Wares		
Undecorated	+	+
Hand Painted Polychrome	+	-
Spongeware	-	-
Banded Ware	+	-
Edge-Decorated	+	-
Transferware	+	+
Molded White Ironstone	-	-
Porcelain	+	+
Copper Luster	-	-
Decal-Decorated	+	-
Marks	+	+



Figure 6. Euro-American stoneware artifacts.

## Euro-American Wares

The following are the subcategories for the different types of Euro-American ceramics, distinguished by their decorative elements.

### *Undecorated*

Undecorated wares are those that lack decoration from the other subcategories below. According to Walter (2011:9), “Only vessels *with rims present* [emphasis from original] were identified as undecorated.” The collection from Los Peñasquitos (both the Field and Knoll) contains approximately 16 undecorated items, based solely on the undecorated rims (Figures 7 and 8). Several of the items are large utilitarian vessels, possibly chamber pots or basins. A few sherds could be hotelware, but most of the pieces in the collection are too small to identify their functional category.

### *Hand Painted Polychrome*

Approximately six fragments of this subcategory have been found at Los Peñasquitos from the Field. Five of the fragments articulate and one fragment shows a small area of a leaf or branch pattern. The articulated



*Figure 7. Undecorated ware artifact.*



*Figure 8. Undecorated ware artifact.*



*Figure 9. Hand-painted polychrome artifact.*



*Figure 10. Hand-painted polychrome artifact.*



*Figure 11. Banded ware artifact.*

fragments feature a four- or five-petaled flower surrounded by thin-lined leaves. No hand-painted polychrome artifacts were found at the Knoll. Only the two “patterns” are present in the Los Peñasquitos collection (Figures 9 and 10).

### ***Banded Ware***

A single sherd of banded ware was found at the Field at Los Peñasquitos (Figure 11). The fragment, yellow-glazed and featuring five white molded bands about two centimeters below the rim, appears to be a vessel with a diameter of approximately nine centimeters. No banded ware has been found on the Knoll.

### ***Edge-Decorated***

In the Los Peñasquitos collection, four sherds were found with a decorated edge, which is molded in a soft wave pattern with a thin gold line just inside the rim (Figure 12). These four fragments articulate to form the largest ceramic vessel in the Los Peñasquitos collection (the size of a dessert plate). Approximately 75% of the plate is represented. No edge-decorated artifacts have been recovered from the Knoll.

### ***Transferware***

The Los Peñasquitos collection has few transferware artifacts, most of which are from the Field (Figure 13). The largest of these is a molded vessel in a hexagonal or octagonal shape with a black transfer floral design. Two fragments of brown transferware were also found in the Field. One features a leaf pattern on both sides of the rim and the other illustrates the domed top of a building on one side of the rim and architectural details on the other side of the rim. Several small sherds of flow blue transferware were also found in the collection, one of which is from the Knoll.



*Figure 12. Edge- and decal-decorated plate.*



*Figure 13. Transferware artifacts.*

### ***Porcelain***

Approximately 20% of the artifacts in the Los Peñasquitos collection are porcelain, including such fragments as a portion of a creamer pitcher, the small decorative scroll from a teacup handle, and a thin cylindrical teacup handle (Figure 14). Porcelain artifacts are found throughout both the Field and the Knoll units, but most of the sherds are small and non-diagnostic as to vessel shape or function.

### ***Decal-Decorated***

The edge-decorated plate noted above (Figure 12) is a decal-decorated vessel, featuring a spray of various flowers and leaves and a gold line around the rim that is no longer visible in some areas.



*Figure 14. Porcelain artifacts.*



*Figure 15. Embossed stoneware artifact.*



*Figure 16. Unidentified maker's mark.*

### ***Marks***

Marked ceramics are woefully scarce from the Palomar College collection. Only two marked vessels have been found at Los Peñasquitos, and those marks are not complete enough to make a determination as to the manufacturer (Figures 15 and 16). A stoneware vessel from the Field shows a small portion of a mark from the sidewall of the item, with only the letter “N” visible, with part of circle around it. Two fragments from a piece from the Knoll show part of a maker’s mark on the underside of the item (likely a plate), although the mark may possibly include the word “England.”

### **CONCLUSION**

The ceramic assemblage at Los Peñasquitos contains typical nineteenth and twentieth century wares, both fine and utilitarian wares, that we would expect to see given the variety of people who lived there over the course of the ranch’s history. From the wealthy ranch owners and their families to the ranch hands and cowboys who lived and worked there, the artifacts add details to their stories and the histories that we already know and introduce questions about the history that we have yet to learn. While this analysis did not yield much new information about the people who lived at the adobe, additional analyses would extend our knowledge of this site, as would studying the link between the finer wares at the bunkhouse to determine who

actually lived there. Answering these questions (and more) can help us to preserve these important pieces of the history of ranching in San Diego.

## REFERENCES

Van Wormer, Stephen R., and Susan D. Walter

- 2011 *Two Forks in the Road: Test Excavations of the Ranch House at Warner's Ranch (Warner-Carrillo Ranch House) and Site of Jonathan T. Warner's House and Store* (Volumes I, II, and III). <http://sohosandiego.org/images/twoforksintheroad.pdf>.

Walter, Susan D.

- 2011 Ceramics at Warner's Ranch. In *Two Forks in the Road: Test Excavations of the Ranch House at Warner's Ranch (Warner-Carrillo Ranch House) and Site of Jonathan T. Warner's House and Store*. Volume 3. <http://sohosandiego.org/images/twoforksintheroad.pdf>.