

IN WITH THE NEW AND OUT WITH THE OLD: INTERPRETING HOUSEHOLD TRANSITIONS

THAD M. VAN BUEREN

Transitional events have an abiding interest for archaeologists. Those events are often marked by distinct stratigraphic breaks (interfaces) associated with changes in occupancy, land use, or catastrophes such as fires and floods. While family occupations spanning several generations may be characterized by more conservative change, pivotal transitions such as changes in the female household head can also lead to distinct construction and disposal events with high interpretive value. This presentation considers the implications of a deposit created when the matriarch of a San Mateo County farm died and it was taken over by her son and his wife.

Transitional events have always been important in archaeology. Historical archaeologists are particularly attuned to stratigraphic interfaces that signal events like the modernization of water and sewer facilities, the arrival or departure of occupants, or catastrophes like fires, earthquakes, and floods. Yet not all transitions are that obvious. This paper focuses on an unassuming little surface refuse scatter that is associated with a farm occupied by the same family for over 80 years (Van Bueren 2004). The refuse scatter illustrates two issues that deserve our attention. First, it highlights the importance of using many different lines of evidence to determine a period of deposition, rather than just the most obvious one. Second, it explores the interpretive power of transitional events as windows into generational changes and the negotiation of power within households.

The refuse dump considered here was unexpectedly discovered in 2002 during a Caltrans wetland restoration project near Menlo Park in southern San Mateo County (Figure 1). Site CA-SMA-368/H is located near the margin of San Francisco Bay next to a former meander of Ravenswood Slough (Figure 2). It is associated with the Carnduff farm, a site recorded as CA-SMA-160/H and also known as the Hiller Mound because it is situated atop a prehistoric shell midden. Irish immigrant Samuel Carnduff started the farm with 50 acres in 1865, using proceeds he had acquired through gold mining. Within two years he expanded the farm west to Willow Road and also purchased adjoining salt marshes to north (Figure 3). The marshlands were bought with the intention of creating a ship landing, although it was never developed. By 1899 the farm featured three buildings. Only the main farm house remained by the time the Carnduff descendants sold the farm in 1947. It stood until it was extensively damaged by fire in the 1970s.

PERIOD OF DEPOSITION

The Carnduff dump contains a minimum of 560 historic artifacts, plus a few structural items, ecofacts, and bulk materials (Table 1). Materials in the dump are extensively fragmented, with only a handful of whole objects. The dump is essentially a surface scatter with some materials found as much as 12 inches below the ground surface. Surface and buried deposits were collected separately, but hundreds of cross mends show the deposit is a single undifferentiated depositional event. The production periods for artifacts in the collection span a nominal range from 1862 to 1915 when dates are adjusted for the onset of occupation (Figure 4). Four specimens made before the onset of occupation were clearly kept and then discarded later. Manufacture of the most recent item in the assemblage began in 1915. From this evidence is thus tempting to conclude it accumulated gradually over a 50 year period. Yet further consideration suggests the Carnduff dump was actually created as a one-time household renovation event around 1917. The absence of materials clearly postdating 1915 first got me thinking about the significance of that end date. It closely coincides with the date when the farm finally passed to the second generation in 1917, after more than 50 years under the control of the patriarch Samuel and then his widow Anne (Figure 5). Notice here that Samuel and Anne's only son William married Kate in 1890 and resided on the farm with his large family for 27 years before he assumed control of it. During that time the couple had six children.

Given these known transitions, how can we distinguish a one-time discard from repetitive discard over a longer period? Lets look first at differences in the dating of glass and ceramic artifacts (Table 2, Figure 6). Glass dates in the Carnduff dump are significantly later

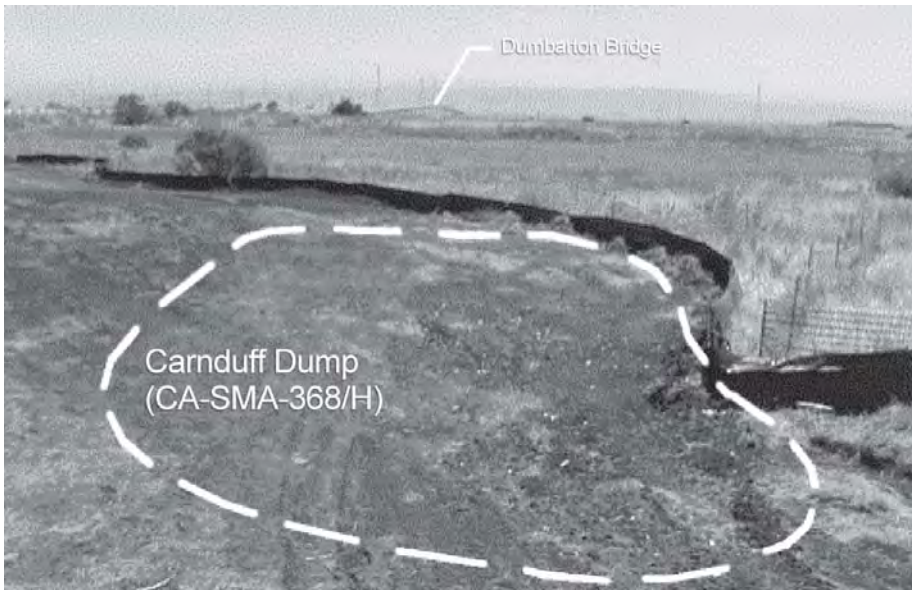


Figure 1: Overview of Carduff dump (CA-SMA-368/H).

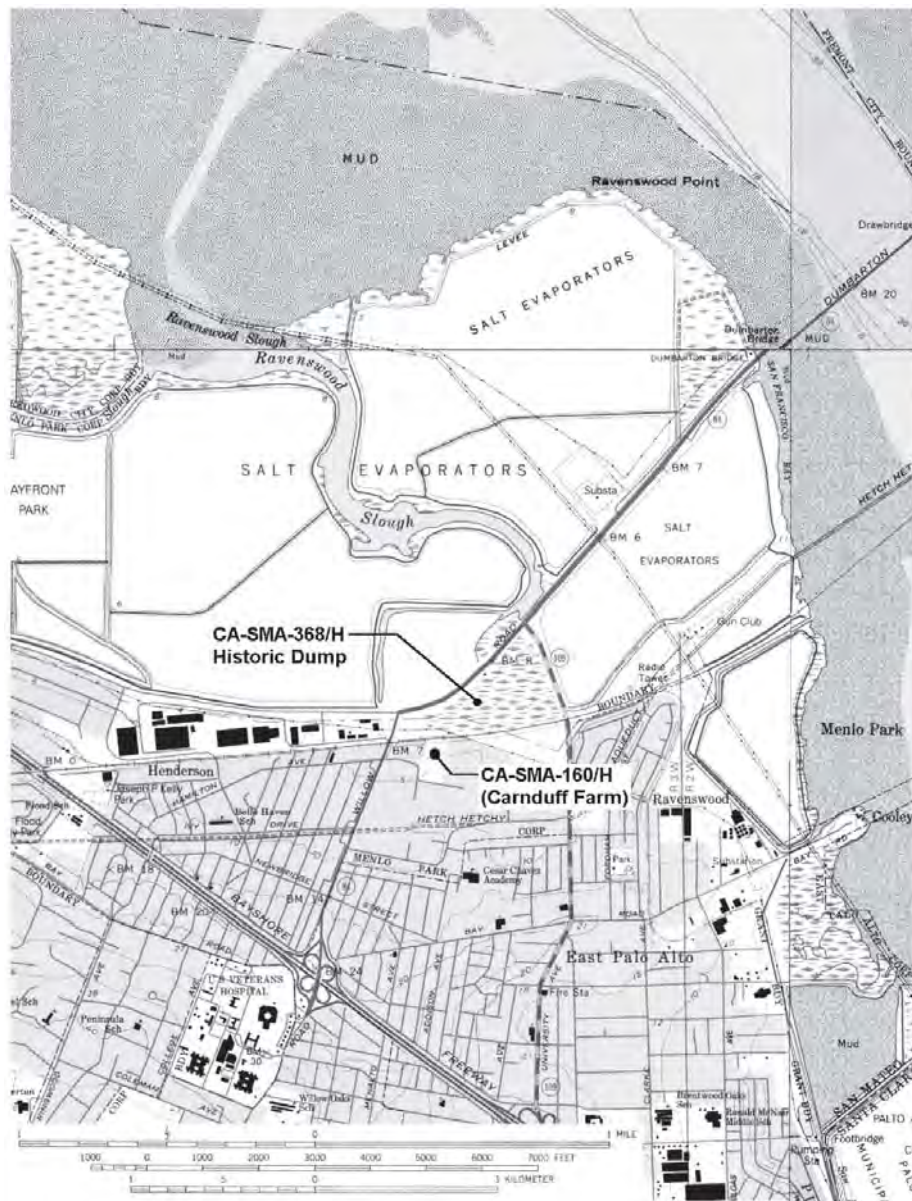


Figure 2: Site Location.

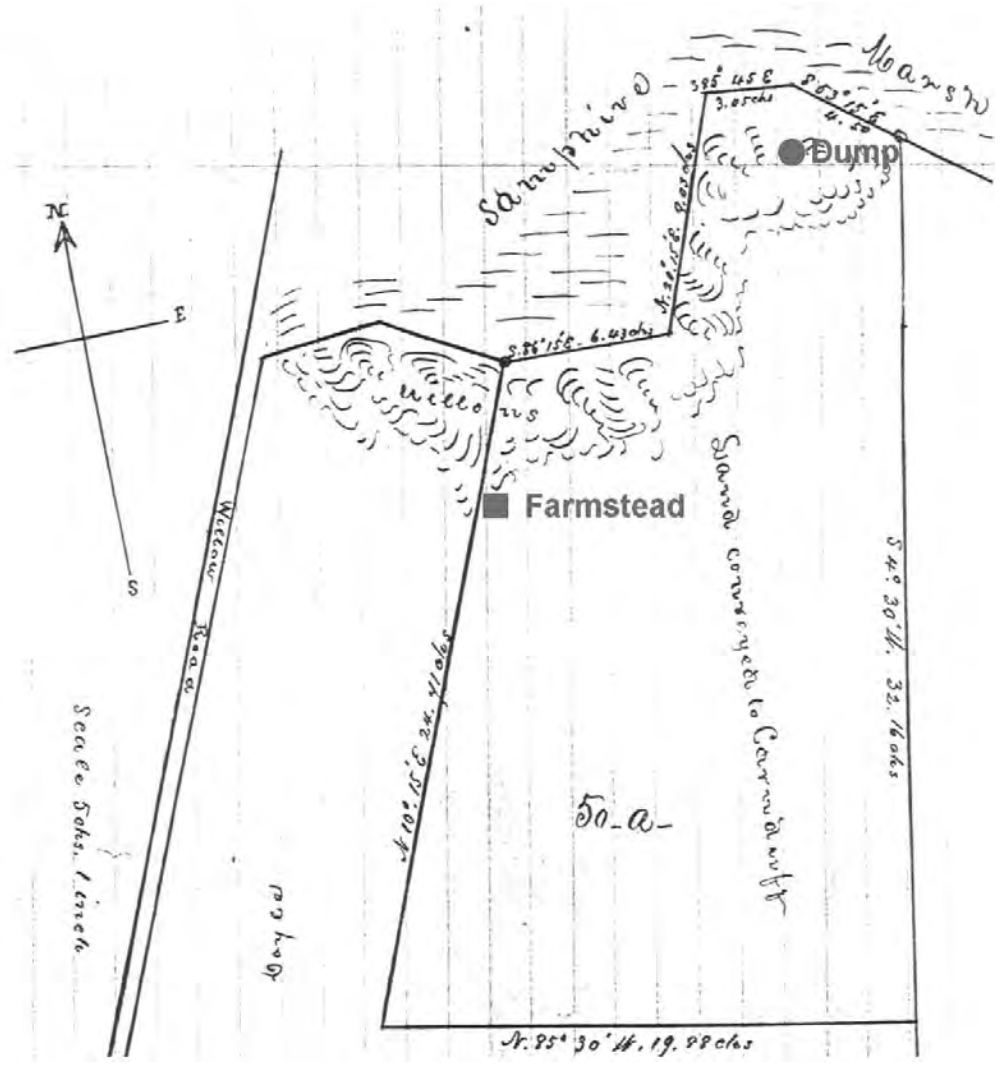
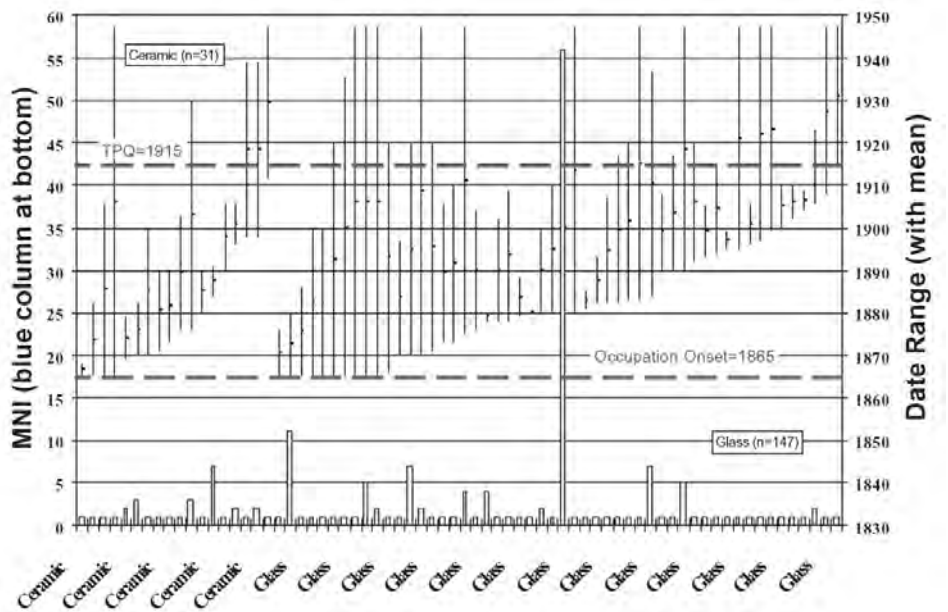


Figure 3: Deed map of Carnduff Farm.

Figure 4: Date ranges for temporally diagnostic items.



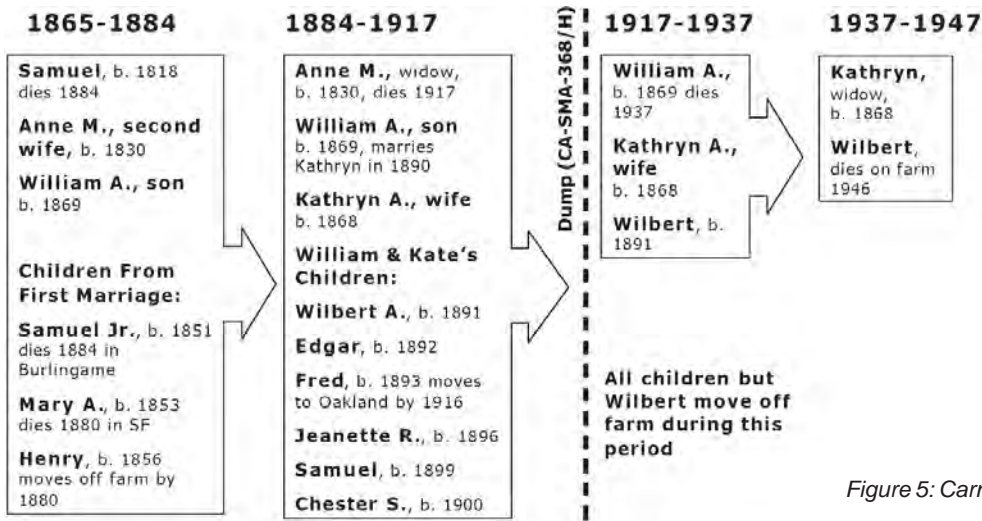


Figure 5: Carnduff family transitional events.

than the ceramics, with a mean terminal date for glass of 1909. According to William Adams (2003), one of the foremost authorities on time lag, glass and ceramic use lives did not significantly diverge in this manner until the onset of mechanized glass production around 1900. Prior to that time both types of material often remained in circulation for up to 35 years or more. This chart provides another way to visualize the divergence of mean dates in the Carnduff dump. The point here is that more early glass would be expected if the assemblage accumulated gradually. Instead, over 85% of the glass could have been produced after 1900 and many early bottles are of types that were very likely to be reused. For example, several early soda bottles may have been used to store the root beer that was made from extract.

The selective composition of the assemblage adds more weight to the one-time disposal scenario. In the first place, the Carnduff dump diverges from expectations for a deposit reflecting the daily life of the

whole family. There are no artifacts such as toys, clothing or footwear that might be attributed to children, for instance. But there were many children in the family. There are also relatively low amounts of faunal remains, food containers, and non-alcoholic beverages which are normally prevalent in household deposits of the period. The Carnduff dump is also atypical in other ways. To understand those differences I compared the dump with 18 other sampled Irish households (Tables 3 and 4).

This comparison analyzes selected classes of material recovered from discrete features representing 3 rural households and 15 urban ones from nearby Oakland. With one exception these assemblages came from privies. I've broken them down by period and urban versus rural to highlight differences, which are expressed in each case as percentages of the total minimum number of individual specimens (MNI). The Carnduff dump has unusually high numbers of food

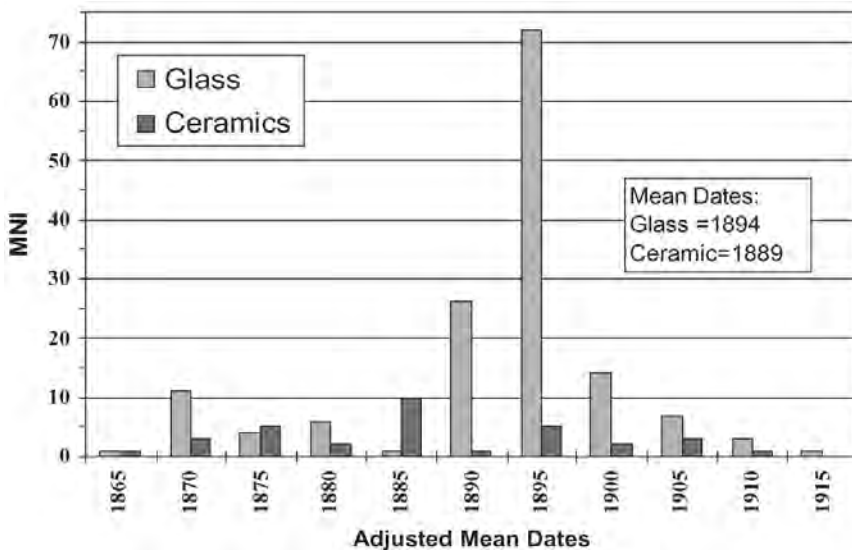


Figure 6: Comparison of glass and ceramic mean dates.

Group	Category	Type	Count	MNI	Group	Category	Type	Count	MNI				
Activities	Gardening	Containers	7	2	Faunal	Bones	Animal	92	0				
		Indefinite	2	1		Shells	Shellfish	33	0				
		Glue Bottle	1	1		Faunal Subtotal		125	0				
	Sewing	Fabric Seal	1	1	Floral	Seed	Seed	1	0				
		Smithing	Arvil	1		1	Floral Subtotal		1	0			
	Tools	Eye Hook	Indefinite	1	1	Indefinite	Indefinite	Closures	2	2			
			Containers	15	4			Containers	416	145			
	Writing	Containers	Indefinite			Indefinite	Indefinite	Indefinite	341	18			
			Activities Subtotal	28	11			Indefinite Subtotal	759	165			
	Domestic	Household	Clothes Iron	1	1	Industrial	Machinery	Mold	3	1			
Containers			81	27	Dial			1	1				
Shoulder Seal			1	1	Industrial Subtotal			4	2				
Stopper			1	1	Personal			Clothing	Closures	3	3		
Food Prep/ Consumption		Drinking Vessels	26	11		Fasteners	3		2				
		Indefinite	139	13		Leather	2		1				
		Kitchen	102	16		Grooming/ Health	Containers	96	41				
		Serving	479	67			Container w/closure	3	1				
		Tableware	146	47		Social Drugs	Indefinite	Container	2	1			
Food Storage		Closures	4	2			Alcohol Containers	231	44				
		Containers	176	34		Personal Subtotal		340	93				
Furnishings		Clock	Decorative Items	133		14	Structural	Electric	Wiring	1	1		
			Handle	1		1			Hardware	Fastener	1	1	
			Mirror	2	1	Indefinite			Indefinite	6	4		
			Heating/ Lighting	Coal	3				65 g	Materials	Mortar	1	28 g
		Lamps		17	8	Roofing	5	0					
		Indefinite	Closure	Containers	8	3	Sewer Pipe	27	0				
				Decorative Items	7	3	Window Glass	33	0.3 kg				
				Indefinite	663	29	Roof Tile	8	0.2 kg				
				Structural Subtotal		82	6	Domestic Subtotal		1994	282	Grand Total	

*Counts combine fragments and whole pieces for all contexts. Weights are given in place of a MNI for bulk materials, if known.

Table 1: Historic materials from CA-SMA-368/H by type and quantity.*

Statistic	Glass	Ceramic
Mean initial date	1879	1879
Mean of date ranges	1894	1889
Mean terminal date	1909	1898
Standard Deviation of date ranges	9.24122	11.62284

*Date ranges adjusted to indicated 1865-1917 deposition period.

Table 2: Comparison of glass and ceramic mean dates.

Name	Deposit Date	Location	Feature	Percentages of Total MNI*						Total MNI*
				Food	Food Prep/ Consumption	Food Storage	Alcohol	Grooming/ Health	Clothing	
Bass	1928	LAS-1756	A4	11.0	21.5	7.6	1.7	5.2	10.5	172
Carnduff	1915	SMA-368	1	7.5	39.8	9.6	11.4	10.9	1.8	387
Sanderson	1900s	AMA-364	3	7.5	21.7	5.0	5.0	5.0	8.3	120
Brady	1902	Oakland	968	5.8	19.3	3.9	2.6	13.5	2.9	311
Kinsella	1900	Oakland	1317	3.2	24.6	0	7.1	6.3	10.3	127
O'Brien	1900	Oakland	300	2.2	21.5	4.4	6.1	3.3	11.1	181
O'Brien	1900	Oakland	2870	3.3	46.2	7.0	8.1	8.1	1.1	359
Haggarty	1890	MNI-1382	A&B	6.1	20.3	2.7	7.4	6.1	27.0	148
Fallon	1890	Oakland	1454	3.3	33.3	2.7	5.3	10.7	4.0	150
Barry	1887	Oakland	4234	4.0	15.6	1.6	3.2	12.5	13.2	377
McDonald	1880s	Oakland	3178	3.1	31.4	1.9	8.8	8.2	11.9	159
Murray	1880s	Oakland	3185	5.4	27.6	3.2	4.1	12.2	10.8	221
(Irish renter)	1880s	Oakland	4648	2.4	29.5	1.2	3.6	7.2	21.7	166
Donovan	1880	Oakland	947	5.2	20.0	5.8	4.5	5.2	18.1	155
Irving	1880	Oakland	955	2.4	17.8	0.6	1.8	5.5	28.8	326
McLaughlin	1880	Oakland	2822	2.4	22.8	0.4	3.2	10.0	21.4	499
Quinn	1880	Oakland	3830	3.5	17.7	0	26.5	7.1	8.0	113
Corrigan	1880	Oakland	4245	1.6	23.6	0	7.1	7.1	7.1	127
McNamara	1880	Oakland	4724	3.6	17.5	0	10.8	10.8	22.7	194

*Excludes structural materials, faunal remains, and unidentified items. See text for sources.

Table 3: Comparison of selected artifact classes among Irish households in northern California.

Mean Proportion of Assemblages*	Food	Food Prep./ Consumption	Food Storage	Alcohol	Grooming/ Health	Clothing
Carnduff	7.5	39.8	9.6	11.4	10.9	1.8
All households (n=18)	4.4	24.8	3.0	6.8	8.2	12.7
Agrarian (n=3)	8.0	25.8	6.2	6.4	6.8	11.9
Urban (n=15)	3.4	24.6	2.2	6.9	8.5	12.9
All post-1900 (n=7)	5.8	27.8	5.4	6.0	7.5	6.6
All pre-1900 (n=11)	3.6	23.1	1.7	7.2	8.6	16.2

*Derived from Table 3.

Table 4: Analyzed differences.

preparation and consumption vessels. These include many unique serving wares that were likely retained as a treasured parlor decorations. Storage wares are also found in high numbers. The collection is noteworthy in part because there are so many mismatched and long out of fashion serving and table wares.

The only personal items found in abundance are alcoholic beverages and medicinal products, which are more prevalent in the Carnduff dump than in most other comparative contexts. The medicines could perhaps be linked to the aging Anne Carnduff, although there is no way to be certain. Interestingly, those medicines included many alcoholic and narcotic preparations including a Coca Mariana wine bottle known to contain cocaine. These alcoholic health products could reflect the pattern observed by Rorabaugh (1979:12-13) that women, who were supposed to be the moral guardians of the home, may have been forced to imbibe covertly. Apart from those personal items, the assemblage is dominated by materials reflecting the public aspects of life in the household which Anne controlled.

Other clues supporting the idea of a renovation event are pieces of ceramic sewer pipe and electrical wiring. They imply household amenities were either installed or upgraded around the time the dump was created. We also know William purchased a car immediately after his mother's death and that he began to lease land to Chinese farmers. These changes hint at a fundamental shift in the way the farm was managed after Anne's death.

THE INTERPRETIVE VALUE OF HOUSEHOLD TRANSITIONS

More fine-grained analysis strengthened this idea of a one-time renovation event. Looking at dated artifacts by period, a pattern of more opulent spending characterizes the period before Samuel's death in 1884. The more expensive porcelains and the limited collection of food and non-alcoholic beverages containers all date to that period. Those early extravagances gave way to a much more austere pattern of spending when the household came under Anne's exclusive control. The ceramics purchased during her tenure include many mismatched wares of diverse patterns, suggesting piecemeal or even second-hand acquisitions. This would have conveyed lower status to visitors.

Home production was also emphasized. Purchased food products including canned goods are completely absent. Food storage containers such as crocks and canning jars are abundant. There is also evidence of production of both alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages and the purchase of bulk cloth for sewing projects. A sewing machine is listed in assessment records. The only real luxuries purchased during Anne's reign as the head of the household are alcoholic beverages and health and grooming products consisting mainly of patent medicines.

Anne's thrifty spending was not a product of poverty, however. Instead, it appears to have sprung from philosophical inclination. While she did take out a mortgage in the period following her husband's death, that note was successfully retired within five years. Assessments for the farm consistently grew, amounting to \$9500 in value the year after her death (Table 5). In

Table 5: Assessments for Carnduff farm at selected dates.

Year	Acres	Land	Improvements	Personal Property	Total
1870	73	\$3650	Not separated	\$350: 8 horses (\$240); 5 cows (\$35); 12 chickens (\$20); wagon (\$25); reaper (\$30)	\$4000
1880	73	\$4380	\$1000	\$550 total: furniture (\$20); sewing machine (\$15); farm utensils (\$50); farm machinery (\$30); three wagons (\$40); five horses (\$170); three cows (\$60); two calves (\$1); two mules (\$100); hogs (\$10)	\$5930
	136	\$270	None		\$270
1890	73	\$7300	\$700	\$490 total	\$8490
1900	73.21	\$6000	\$500	\$300 total: furniture (\$50); machinery (\$20); wagons (\$30); four horses (\$50); harness (\$10); two cows (\$40)	\$6800
	140	\$200	None		\$200
1910	56.15	\$6000	\$500	\$260 total: machinery (\$20); wagon (\$30); harness (\$10); four horses (\$150); two cows (\$50)	\$6760
	139	\$600	None		\$600
1918	56.18	\$7500	\$500	Crop \$250; Autos \$300; pers. Prop. \$250	\$9500
	139	\$1250	None		

addition, her probate reveals that \$8,346 in cash was distributed to her heirs.

As previously mentioned, household spending practices shifted after Anne's death. In addition to the purchase of a car and upgrades of house sewer and electrical amenities, we can deduce that all of those discarded food preparation and consumption wares that were dumped had to be replaced. Together, these facts suggest a fairly extensive facelift of the domestic sphere at a specific moment in time. Materials that would be expected in a household deposit created by the whole family over a longer period simply were not present.

It is also intriguing that materials in the dump were highly fragmentary and were located far from the house. Those facts hint at purposeful breakage and a symbolic distancing from Anne's values. If true, this assemblage may reflect a rejection of outdated fashions and, perhaps more tellingly, values such as frugality and possibly also alcoholic beverage consumption. Only further investigation of later Carnduff assemblages can answer that question definitively, however.

CONCLUSION

What on first examination seemed to be a deposit lacking temporal focus appears instead to be a transitional event with considerable interpretive value. I hope I have made a convincing case for weighing family transitions, time lag, and the composition of assemblages together when assessing periods of deposition. I've also tried to sketch some of the interpretive value of transitional events as reflections of intergenerational dynamics. In many cases it appears that change often takes place episodically as power is transferred from one generation to the next.

.....

REFERENCES CITED

- Adams, William H.
2003 Dating Historical Sites: The Importance of Understanding Time Lag in the Acquisition, Curation, Use, and Disposal of Artifacts. *Historical Archaeology* 37(2):38-64.
- Rorabaugh, W. J.
1979 *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, England.

Van Bueren, T. M.

2004 *Contemplating Household transitions: Investigations at the Carnduff Dump (CASMA-368/H) in San Mateo County, California*. California Department of Transportation, Oakland.