

**A PROCESSUAL ANALYSIS APPROACH
TOWARDS BETTER COLLABORATION IN DETERMINING THE SIGNIFICANCE
OF MULTI-COMPONENT HISTORIC PROPERTIES**

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Archaeologists and Historians/Architectural Historians have collaborated for many years on evaluations of properties with both built-environment and historical archaeological components, with varying degrees of success. While collaboration is certainly not a novel concept, we advocate a four-tiered model or process using written, visual, oral, and archaeological data in concert to arrive at defensible arguments regarding site significance. The model proposes early collaboration to set goals, objectives, and benchmarks in establishing data sets, periods of significance, and various analytical approaches. We will model this approach using the Mariner Ranch (CA-PLA-2185H), a multi-component property in western Placer County that dates from the late nineteenth through the latter part of the twentieth century (Figure 1).

The importance of collaboration on properties with architectural and historical archaeological resources is essential in order to arrive at defensible arguments regarding site eligibility and findings of significance. This is a great opportunity for one discipline to inform another. What does collaboration mean and how is it accomplished? This paper focuses on rural vernacular agricultural properties, which can be difficult to evaluate because “there are hundreds of them” or “they are not like anything else.” There has been little attention paid to agricultural properties, compared to other property types, at least in California.

For most of the nineteenth century and through the first three decades of the twentieth century, agriculture was one of the most important industries in California. However, during the past 50 years, California’s agricultural land base has shrunk nearly in half, most of it giving way to residential suburbs. Because there are decreasing numbers of historic-era farms, we need to think about this type of resource and develop a better way to evaluate it.

One of the tools available is the recently published *Historical Context and Archaeological Research Design for Agricultural Properties in California* (California Department of Transportation 2007). This interdisciplinary study presents a research design for evaluating archaeological properties, which is supplemented by a broad historical context. While it was not the intent of the study to establish a research design for evaluating architectural properties, agricultural properties typically have both archaeological and architectural remains. It is therefore important for archaeologists and historians to develop a process for working together on these properties.

Mariner Ranch

The Mariner Ranch lies in western Placer County near the floor of the Sacramento Valley, north of Lincoln and south of Wheatland. The ranch lies within the Coon Creek Watershed that runs west from the foothills towards the Sacramento River (Figure 2). The need to assess the cultural significance of the Mariner Ranch was a result of its acquisition by the State of California, as a biological mitigation area for the Lincoln Bypass Project. This discussion does not focus on the project, but rather on a methodological process that can be efficient and effective in arriving at defensible arguments for site significance.



Figure 1. Mariner Ranch in Western Placer County.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCESS

Our four-step methodological process includes things we all do when evaluating properties, but outlining the process makes it more deliberate for ease of teamwork and communication. Optimally, goals and benchmarks are clearly defined within each step from site identification to the final evaluation. This methodological process involves these steps:

- defining the property and study area;
- setting up the process for collaboration;
- collecting data; and
- evaluating the property.

Step 1: Defining the Property

What is the property and how large is the study area? This depends on the project and the property. The study area for archaeologists is generally the boundaries of the project, or the Area of Potential Effects (APE). Historians will identify the property based upon the buildings, structures, and

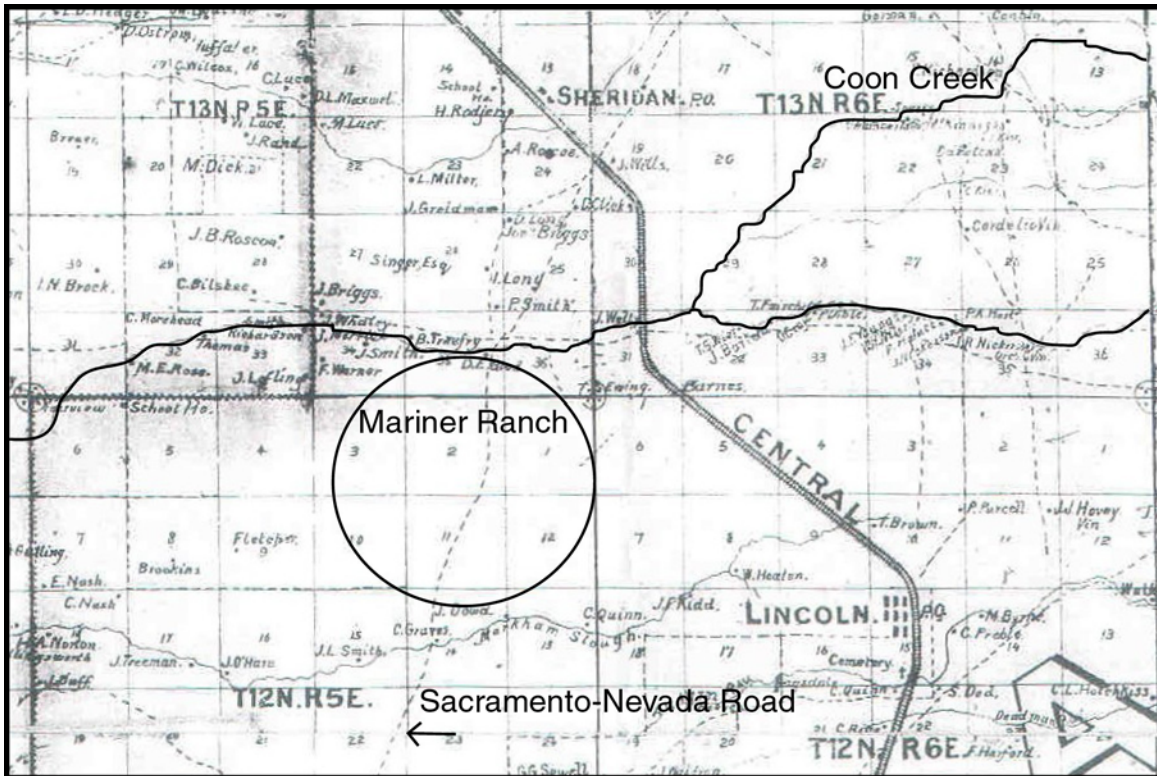


Figure 2. Location of the Mariner Ranch. Official Map of Placer County, E. C. Uren, 1868.

landscape features that are located within the APE, where effects may be direct or indirect. For archaeologists and historians, how large do you need to make the comparative study area? Is it the immediate parcel, a one-mile radius, a larger area, or a geographical area determined by the land settlement patterns? Historical archaeologists compare features in a site with those from similar properties that may be located hundreds of miles away.

Step 2: Setting up the Process

Determining the process is as important as the actual research. This is dependent on the property and what expertise is needed to best evaluate it, whether that of an architectural historian, historian, landscape architect, geographer, historical archaeologist, etc. Many of us work for federal, state, or local government agencies and need to do the project with in-house staff. Even though we may not be able to hire a geographer, for example, there are tools that geographers use that may assist in our research efforts. Question to address include: How is the work divided? Who records the site? Who does archival research? Which repositories are used? How will this property be evaluated?

What process could be set up to evaluate complex, multi-component, or ubiquitous properties? A weighting system that assigns points for various attributes may be one solution. The results from the weighting system, which attempts to reduce or eliminate bias, can then be compared with the typical National Register evaluation approach, which is largely based upon intuition and is generally more subjective.

Open lines of communication are very important, as are routine meetings or conversations regarding methodology, data, and preliminary conclusions. The most difficult challenge is the difference in our disciplines. Archaeologists do not have the expertise of historians or architectural historians, and

the converse is also true. The specialists involved need to have flexibility and a willingness to hear group ideas. Consider setting up regular meetings or phone conferences for the team to discuss the project and the progress that is being made. Avoid working separately until the draft report is compiled. If there are data gaps at this point, they may be hard to correct.

Step 3: Collecting the Data

The approach to data collection should be tied to the property type and the study area. This is best accomplished by using visual, written, oral, and archaeological data. Visual information can be gathered through on-site visits to the property, examination of historical and current aerial photographs, and use of web-based data such as Google Earth. The spatial area of study should be based upon land forms, settlement patterns, site-specific data, and visual imagery such as historical photographs, aerial views, and textual data found in historic maps. Site-specific data should focus on the physical arrangement of buildings, structures, and objects on the property, and their relationships to natural and other cultural landforms.

Written data may include land office records, local government records, county histories, and other published or unpublished primary and secondary sources. Oral accounts are useful if they can help inform or add to the existing information gathered through other methodologies. The history of the site's residents is an integral part of interpreting the property. Develop questions as you go along that will be important for gathering oral history. Often local historical societies know names of older people to talk to, if you can't find descendants of the occupants of the property. Ask them questions about the settlement of the property and changes over time.

Archaeologists need to conduct a survey and determine if there is a likelihood for buried features. Can you determine locations of demolished or collapsed buildings? Where were the privies located? Where was the trash deposited? Where were the wells located? What data can the built environment contribute?

Finally, architectural comparative data generated through visual observations from "windshield" surveys or physical inspections of similar properties can help to determine site representativeness or uniqueness and, ultimately, site eligibility.

Step 4: Evaluating the Property

There are several methodologies for evaluating complex or multi-component architectural and archaeological properties include. Historical Archaeologists address research questions based on an historic context and research design. Historians and Architectural Historians routinely utilize the National Register process. A third methodology is a systematic approach using a holistic or weighted scale where each attribute or characteristic of the property is rated or weighted on a sliding scale, such as one to ten, with ten being high and one being low. Negative points may be assigned to properties that have dramatically reduced levels of integrity. Each attribute can be analyzed and weighted with regard to its ability to provide or convey important information or data.

This weighted approach has been tested on several ubiquitous architectural property types in California, but to our knowledge has not been used on archaeological properties. It was first applied to fire lookout towers in California and on U.S. Forest Service recreational residence tracts throughout California (McNeil 2000, USDA Forest Service 1989). Both systems shared common approaches and focused on efficiency in collecting data, and consistency in data analysis.

Integrity is an integral part of any analysis of architectural and archaeological properties. Decisions regarding integrity are often based largely upon the degree to which a property has changed or been altered over time. An important consideration is when the change occurred, how it affects the property's visual appearance, how consequential it is to the historic function of the property, and whether it occurred within or outside the period of significance of the property. Consideration should be also be given to whether the change was positive--that is, did it benefit the respective property owner--or

negative, a result of incremental changes that lack importance, or through events such as a fire, or additions that occurred outside the period of significance.

The vast majority of California's agricultural properties that developed during the nineteenth and first part of the twentieth century were vernacular in design and form. Exceptions include the main residence, which in many cases utilized stock house plans or followed popular or prevailing architectural trends. Clearly, change was an inherent part of the physical and cultural development of agricultural properties. Therefore, understanding change over time provides a base line for interpreting the history of the property and developing research questions that are measurable and defensible.

APPLYING THE METHODOLOGY TO THE MARINER RANCH

The Mariner Ranch serves as a useful model to illustrate this methodology. By the 1860s, the property had been patented through homesteading and military scrip, and the present-day ranch began to emerge. Architecturally, the ranch exhibits representative examples that appear to date from the late 1860s or early 1870s through the late 1940s. There are archaeological components, which date between 1900 and the 1940s. Until its sale to Caltrans, the ranch was used for grazing livestock, both historically and in modern times.

Defining the Mariner Property

Caltrans purchased a 530-acre parcel for mitigating impacts to biological resources during construction of the Lincoln Bypass (Figure 3). This was used as the boundary for the architectural and archaeological study area. There was some debate about the comparative study area for the built environment. Is a few miles' radius adequate? The Coon Creek watershed is largely an intact landscape with no subdivisions. Is that too large a comparative study area?

Setting up the Mariner Process

The process established for the Mariner Project was dictated by workload issues; however, we were able to have regular meetings. In this instance, the historical archaeologist conducted the majority of the historical research. We recognized the difficulty for archaeologists and historians to contribute to the evaluation of properties under the other discipline's purview. However, open dialogue with question and answer sessions were effective.

Data Collection for the Mariner Ranch

For the Mariner Ranch, historical and documentary information was gathered using Ancestry.com to search census, birth, death, and other vital records. We also used probate records, tax assessment books, and soils maps from the Placer County Archives. A fabulous resource prepared by a local historian is a summary and partial transcription of the *Placer Herald Newspaper* which provides contemporary accounts of the Mariners and their neighbors from the late 1850s into the twentieth century (Logan 1985). Although we were unable to talk to the Mariners themselves, we conducted interviews with neighbors and members of the local chapter of the Sons of the Golden West; however, we were not able to get much good information for the period prior to the 1940s.

The Coon Creek area was settled by placer miners who mined along upper Coon Creek and by farmers and ranchers who recognized the potential for grazing cattle and growing wheat in the 1850s and 1860s. The area was linked to other centers of commerce and trade by the Sacramento-Nevada Wagon Road that crossed Coon Creek and headed to the gold mining areas. The Mariners came to California in the early 1850s to mine and had become established ranchers in the Coon Creek watershed by 1855.

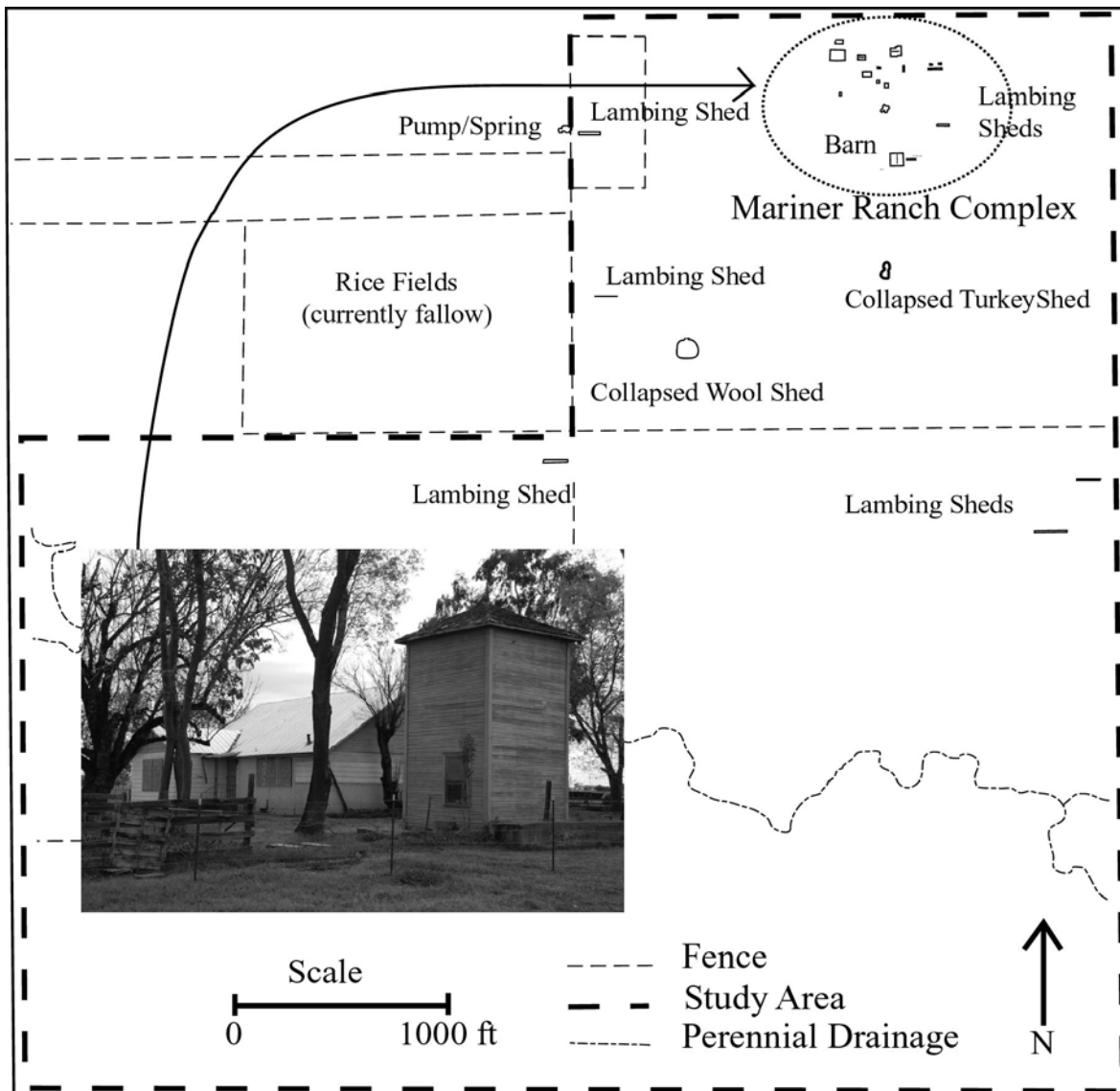


Figure 3. Mariner Ranch 530-acre study area.

Various family members acquired large plats of land, totaling nearly 5,000 acres in the 1880s. The property we are calling the Mariner Ranch changed hands several times in the nineteenth century, until the ranch was acquired by the Mariner family in the early 1900s.

The Mariner Ranch buildings and structures appear to be largely the same as depicted in a 1938 aerial photograph (Figure 4). There are 12 standing building and structures. One barn post-dates the 1938 aerial. Based upon the physical characteristics of the built environment and taking into consideration the association of the ranch with other properties along Coon Creek, many dating to the 1860s and 1870s, the potential for important historic archaeological data seemed high.

One building of note is a two-room, simple wood-frame, clapboard-sided cabin, which may have been moved (Figure 5). It is likely the original dwelling for the first settlers on the ranch. Architectural details including a decorative lintel, circular sawn planks, and a 6-over-6 window (not visible in photo), all indicating it was built in the late 1860s or early 1870s.

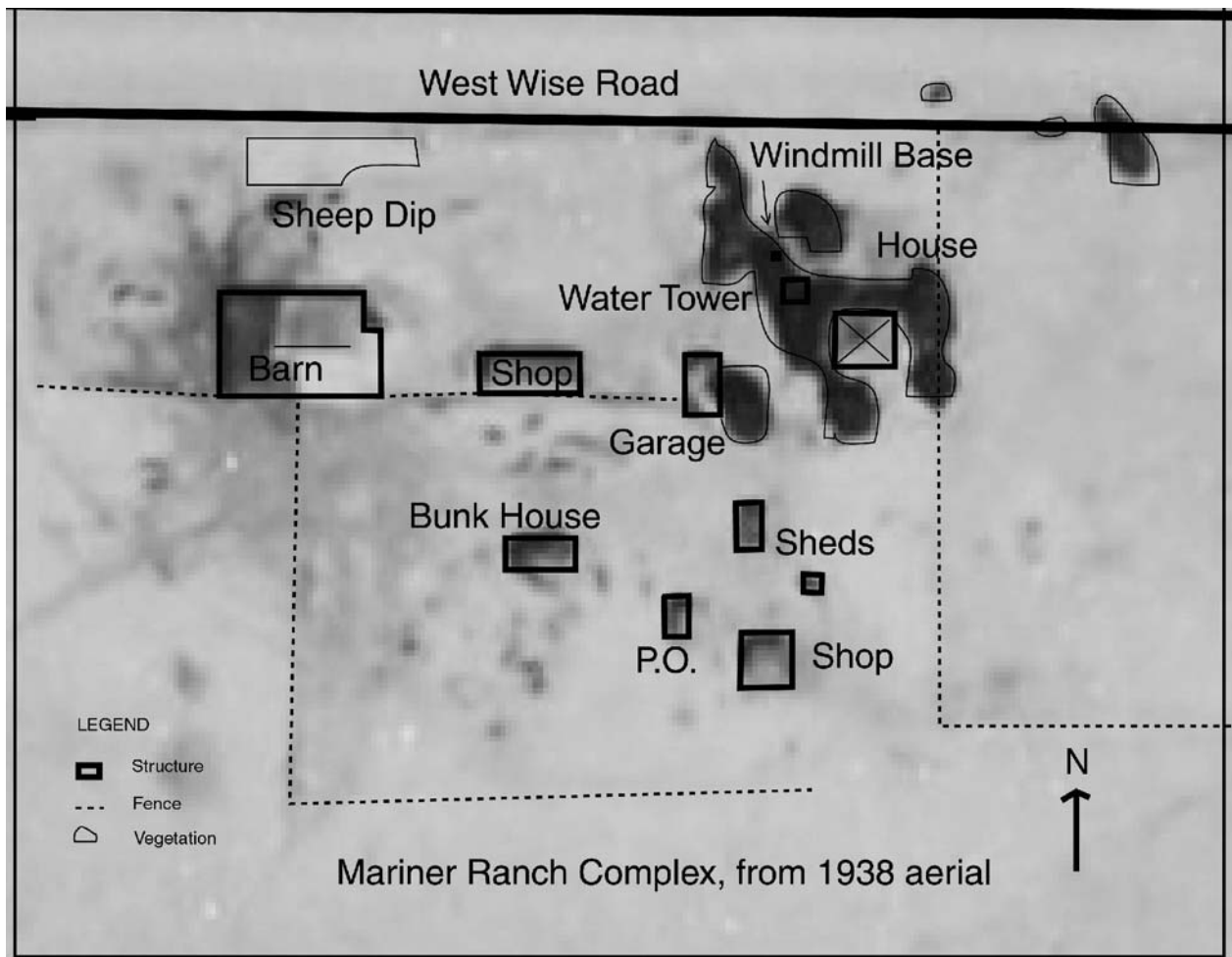


Figure 4. 1938 Aerial view of the Mariner Ranch.

Two archaeological features were identified at the Mariner Ranch: a privy and a well. The privy, designated Feature 1, is located near the house and had a low density of domestic and structural materials with a minimum number of individual artifacts (MNI) of at least 72 and a *terminus post quem* (TPQ) date of 1937. It was identified during mechanical scraping designed to locate refuse-filled features. The well, designated Feature 2, is located 1/3 mi. from the ranch complex first appeared to be a burn pit. This feature contained structural domestic and ranch-related materials with a MNI of 529 and a TPQ date of 1903.

Evaluating the Mariner Property

As the nineteenth century came to a close, occupation and settlement were largely complete along Coon Creek, and all the formerly public lands were now in private ownership. Economically, with marginal soils away from the Coon Creek flood plain, dry farming was difficult and crop size was limited. Most uncultivated land was retained for grazing livestock. After 1900, when the Mariner family acquired the property, they developed the ranch, or perhaps improved it, by shifting to other forms of production, such as sheep and poultry. Barns were either rebuilt or added, a water tower was erected, and a garage and shop were constructed during the late 1910s or 1920s when automobiles and trucks replaced horse-drawn wagons. At least one excess building was acquired by the Mariners when the old “portable” post office from nearby Sheridan was moved onto the ranch. The nineteenth-century main residence was rebuilt in



Figure 5. Late-1860s or early-1870s cabin.

the late 1940s to address health concerns and to modernize its appearance to conform to other properties built during and after World War II.

With the property and study area defined, the players identified, and data collected, the next step was to carry out the analysis and ultimately decide site significance. In this regard, the standard intuitive approach relies largely upon value sets that are more subjective, with less emphasis on quantification or comparative analysis. A rating scheme applied to Mariner Ranch or other multi-component agricultural properties would define what features are important to understanding the property's development and the level of alteration that occurred through time. The archaeological data, equally important, could then be characterized for its potential to address physical and cultural changes that occurred at the ranch and how those changes may reflect broader patterns found within the Coon Creek watershed or study area. As a vernacular property, Mariner Ranch provides an opportunity to compare the social or cultural evolution of the property with the physical characteristics that define it. Subtle features, such as hand-printed wallpaper in the main residence, the adaptation of a post office into a functioning ranch building, or the use of non-standard milled planks and clapboards for constructing a simple frame dwelling, together begin to paint a picture of the occupants of the ranch and life along Coon Creek. Hopefully this collaborative methodology will improve our understanding and analysis of ubiquitous rural properties.

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