

## HOME ON THE RANGE: CONSUMER CHOICE IN CERAMIC WARES AND CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY AT ANNADEL FARMS

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*Annadel Farms was the dream of entrepreneur Joe Coney in mid-twentieth-century Sonoma. The archaeological remains of CA-SON-1577H represent the disposable life of Coney's family. This paper investigates the relationship between material culture and popular social trends, which signals the complex interactions within consumption. It further highlights an interesting and possibly unprecedented event in the discipline of archaeology: the analysis of archaeological remains from the childhood material culture of a contemporary archaeologist. The analysis focuses on both the implications of literally studying the "archaeology of us" and investigating how consumerism and identity are represented in the archaeological record.*

*Anyone passing along the Sonoma-Santa Rosa highway on this beautiful spring day of May 28, 1946 could readily see that some momentous event in horsemanship was taking place in the valley of the moon. Trailer after trailer, huge vans, stage coaches, sulkies, spring wagons and numerous riders on horseback were converging to the first night camp of the Sonoma county Trail Blazers at the beautiful ranch of Joe Coney, Annadel Farms. A more beautiful setting than the Annadel Farms could not have been chosen for the meeting place of all the outdoorsmen and horse lovers of this organization which was making its fifth annual trek through the gorgeous counties of Sonoma, Napa and Lake.*

*Sonoma Trail Blazers, 1952*

This paper endeavors to investigate the relationship between material culture and popular social trends, which is not merely reflected in our belongings, but signals the complex interactions between the things we consume and us—as individuals and members of society. I will discuss how artifacts reflect and respond to the identity of the individuals and families that claimed ownership by analyzing consumerism and stylization. The collection analyzed consists of the ceramics from what is now Annadel State Park, originally excavated in the summer of 1999. To support my research, I will reference oral histories, documentary evidence, and advertising material from catalogues and magazines. I was able to speak directly with Leigh Martin, the former landowner's granddaughter and a practicing archaeologist, who provided information on the family and personal memories of life on the ranch. Her remembrances will be incorporated into the analysis.

### HISTORY

The area that is now Annadel State Park was acquired and consolidated in the mid-1930s by J. "Joe" Coney. A businessman and entrepreneur, Coney saw great potential in the natural resources of the land and developed the area as "Annadel Farms" (Krumbein and Noel 1988: 31). Coney also seemed to fancy himself a bit of a cowboy, as he belonged to local riding clubs such as the Oakland Frontier Boys and Sonoma Trail Blazers (of which he was a founding member in 1940). In fact, the Farm would host ranch parties and annual riding trips. Coney and his wife resided in San Francisco but would visit the Farm occasionally on weekends. They had two children, a son and a daughter. Coney was affluent and his children lived well, including traveling and being educated abroad. Joe's daughter was educated at the University of California, Berkeley where she met and married her husband, who came from a working-class background. Subsequently, their children, while living comfortably, learned the value of a dollar (Martin 2007).

Leigh's family would visit the farm during the summer. Coney's brother and his wife lived on the farm and oversaw its operation while a family friend and his wife also lived on site to maintain the farm. Life there was informal, and the entertaining was lavish but casual (Martin Leigh, personal communication 2007). The Coneys lived and worked like cowboys while the ranch was in operation, and the younger generations grew up with farm life as the norm.

The trash assemblage excavated at the farm in 1999 represents the disposable lives of the multiple families during this period. Because several households, with their own distinct generational prejudices in style and life, are embodied within the assemblage, there is a multiplicity of lives through which the artifacts speak. This analysis endeavors to untangle the voices and distinguish the consumerist behavior behind them and recognize that material culture does not reproduce social relations, but rather is an active participant in these negotiations (Buchli and Lucas 2001).

## **DATA ATTRIBUTES AND ANALYSIS**

### **Stratigraphy**

In field records from the 1999 excavations, it was noted that there were little or no perceivable stratigraphic layers (as such the excavators chose to use arbitrary 10-cm levels). The spatial analysis of the materials suggests that the midden was extremely disturbed during its usage. This is supported by the artifact scatter throughout the levels. While some vessels seemed to be entirely concentrated in one level, some vessels were not, such as Vessel 41, which has been partially reconstructed to confirm it was a single vessel with sherds originating from eight separate layers from both units. The theories of mixing stratigraphy intentionally during the site's usage and trash burning are both further reinforced through specific remembrances by Leigh Martin. She recalled that her uncle used their family dump to bury their beloved dog, which implies that her uncle would have dug a hole to sheath the pet and protect the dump from scavenging animals (Martin 2007).

The proveniences, artifacts, and personal memories all demonstrate that lack of stratigraphic layers do not necessarily indicate a short period of use or extreme site disturbance post-deposition, but rather account for an active and continual usage of the dump by the family. The chronological information acquired from datable ceramics and documentary evidence signifies a terminus post quem of 1920 (Vessel 34) and a terminus ante quem of the early 1960s, after which time Coney's land was acquired by the government (Krumbein and Noel 1988: 32). This strongly supports my theory that the dump was solely used by the various members of the Coney family, and I will presume this for the purpose of my analysis.

### **Vessel Form**

The category of "form" can frequently be problematic—unless one is specifically intensively researching and analyzing this attribute—as it often suggests function. I felt it inappropriate to discuss form in a cursory fashion and attribute a specific or broad form for all vessels accounted for unless I felt completely certain. Therefore, I classified form on an individual basis. In my classifications, I attempted to be as broad as possible without always resorting to "hollowware" or "flatware." Luckily, some vessels could be identified based on popular collectable pieces. This includes Vessel 12, identified as a Homer Laughlin cereal bowl, an incentive piece that came with boxes of "Mother's Oats" (a division of Quarter Oats in the 1940s and 50s); and Vessel 44, which was recognized as a lid to a crock pot based on a film from the 1950s.

Both of these vessels shed light on the consumer practices of the families at the ranch. There is evidence of use-wear on the cereal bowl, indicating that even though it was an incentive purchase, it was regularly used. The crock pot represents a convenience purchase to make cooking less arduous. Because it is not a necessity within the household, it indicates a consumer choice and negotiation between expediency and currency.

A most interesting form, one which might be exceedingly out of place in most household trash deposits of the time was a whiteware spittoon. In light of the cowboy life portrayed by the Coneys, the presence of a spittoon adds another level of understanding. Whether this form was used or merely decorative, its presence alone compliments the rustic lifestyle maintained on the ranch. I was mainly concerned with the overall forms represented in the assemblage. Tea service items were not prominent, but there was a surprising number of more formal flatware; however, both these mainly represented older and less expensive forms and styles. The assemblage contained several whiteware cups that may account for the lack of formal tea service vessels. Leigh Martin informed me that the Coneys kept an industrial-size coffeemaker and they drank out of plain whiteware cups (Martin 2007). This indicates that entertaining was informal, but on a grand scale, as opposed to a formal intimate tea service.

### **Decorative Elaboration and Style**

Archaeologists have suggested an interdisciplinary and stylistic approach to consumerist studies, and some have implemented this within their interpretive strategies (Cochran and Beaudry 2006; Majewski and Schiffer 2001). Excluding plain whitewares, there was no evidence of matching sets or repeating patterns within the assemblage. All sherds with a matching pattern could be reconstructed as a single vessel. I must note, however, that only two units within the site were excavated, and future excavations could provide more information on the styles and patterns represented. A lack of several pieces of a set indicates several possibilities. The vessels in question may have been part of an infrequently used set and thus, in their lifetime, only saw one vessel broken and discarded. Based on a categorization of style, however, many of the sherds can be classified in similar stylistic groupings. Perhaps this demonstrates an individual or group specific taste to consume certain styles of dinnerware, and it could concurrently indicate that sets were cohesive and blended. Although the Coneys lived a comfortable life, since the ranch was a second home, they may have chosen to live a “simpler” life there, without too much concern over their dinnerware. Whatever the case, through style categorization, it is evident that many of the fancier pieces are older (circa 1920s-1930s) than the very informal pieces such as the Fiestawares. Perhaps these pieces belonged to Joe Coney’s sister-in-law who oversaw ranch operations with her husband. If this is the case, it would indicate maintained consumer identity despite changing times and styles.

Several of the pieces had designs, however, that although older, had patterns that maintained popularity into the period of occupation for the site. Similar patterns to Vessel 1 and the Blue Willow vessels can be found in the Montgomery Ward’s catalogues in both the early and late 1950s (Montgomery Ward’s 1951-1952, 1955-1956, 1958). This could reflect on a consumer nature to more frequently use pieces that, although older, could still be regarded as fashionable.

A pattern specifically recalled by Leigh Martin as the main dinnerware pattern used by her family and grandfather was Gladding McBean’s “Franciscan Apple” (Martin 2007). While no identifiable sherds were recovered from the dump, it presents an interesting stylistic choice coinciding with the relaxed, but financially secure, nature of their lifestyle. The apple pattern consists of embossed vessels with apples, leaves, and branches that would later be hand-painted in red, green, and brown, and glazed. The process alone indicates a more expensive product requiring time- and labor-intensive manufacturing. However, the finished product is extremely informal, welcoming, and in line with the time.

In terms of consumerism, many of my stylistic categories can be combined in order to demonstrate several distinct cohesive tastes. The plain whitewares or ironstones can easily fall into these categories, as they were minimally decorated. Furthermore, the more popular vessel styles previously discussed could also be incorporated into any of the categories. I would group the Fiestawares and color centric vessels (Group 2) with the contemporary/casual florals (Group 3C). These florals are generally more brightly colored and incorporate design elements such as wheat in order to make them more casual. These go well with the Fiestawares, which are brightly colored and rely on simplicity rather than busy patterns. I would also group the formal floral vessels (Group 3A) with the scroll-leafed whitewares (Group 1B) and the imported designs, specifically the Blue Willow (Group 4). These styles represent a

more traditional and formal taste and at the very least were used frequently enough that individual pieces were broken or deemed unusable and discarded. While the presence of prominent sets is not available based on the current information, stylistic features indicate at least two distinct consumer choices present in the assemblage.

## INTERPRETATIONS

Every morning, at the break of dawn, “Oh What A Beautiful Morning,” a classic tune from the popular 1943 musical *Oklahoma*, awoke the Sonoma Trail Blazers to signal another day of riding and revelry during their annual week-long treks throughout Sonoma County and surrounding areas. While the majority of the men who belonged to the clubs were prominent business, medical, or law professionals, its conception prompted the men to get back to nature and the simple life of the cowboy [Bederman 1996: emphasis Chapter 3]. However, much of the documentary and photographic evidence from these excursions paints a different picture. The trips were staffed and catered with extravagant meals, though the men did eat their steak and shrimp cocktails on paper flatware and drank their Sonoma wine from disposable Dixie cups (*Frontier Boys Album* 1950). On at least one occasion, Joe Coney used his ranch to host the event, and his farm was depicted favorably by the group’s historian. These activities were ingrained in Coney’s life even before the ranch was established, and strengthened his later lifestyle, encouraging his family to live and enjoy the cowboy life (*Sonoma Trail Blazers* 1952).

The romance of Mission and western culture from an Anglo interpretation of the American western past, inspired by Helen Hunt Jackson’s novel *Ramona*, has generated a subconscious nostalgia for a false and misappropriated heritage that still has strong foundations in California culture today (Thomas 2007). It is clear that this ideology was instilled in the heart of Joe Coney, the patriarch, who in turn helped influence the landscape of Annadel and the identities of his offspring.

During the period of Annadel Farms, Western motifs were popular ornamental elements in Montgomery Ward’s catalogues. America’s nostalgia for the simpler times infiltrated all aspects of popular culture and consumerism. Keeping this in mind, it is not difficult to understand why the Coneys were satisfied in utilizing their financial means to live an informal ranch life, with emphasis placed on informal entertaining and a welcoming home, as opposed to opulent material culture to display their wealth. The West became both an ideology and an identity. More expensive mass-produced items like the “Franciscan Apple” ware became a reflection of the homemade wistful identity to which many Americans could relate. And though the Sonoma Trail Blazers’ annual rides may be viewed as campy and over-the-top in a sense, the ideals of adopting rustic Western life to fit in with “contemporary” modernity became a negotiation and hybridization of American culture.

It is important to note that though this identity may have been dominant on the ranch, the ceramic styles suggest preserved individual (and more elegant and feminine) tastes. While these families displaced themselves from their former homes, they maintained their consumer identity and continued to use these older pieces at least occasionally, merging them with newer styles to generate a unique sense of self.

## CONCLUSION

“This book is dedicated to the men who still possess some of the spirit of the by-gone days and can get away from this present day world and enjoy the comradeship of their fellow men in the surroundings close to nature without worry or care” (*Sonoma Trail Blazers Dedication*, 1952).

The men who rode with the Sonoma Trail Blazers represent a concession between romantic nostalgia for a past that never existed and the modern comforts and necessities to which they were accustomed. This same representation can be viewed within the ceramic collection and its complex relationship to the families that created and gave meaning to the assemblage. It would, however, be too

simple to state that these ceramics are a reflection of the identities inhabiting Annadel Farms, but rather they represent an aspect of the behaviors demonstrated by these individuals.

The analysis of specific attributes observable within the assemblage, namely stratigraphy, form, and decorative elaboration, provide information relating to the consumer choices, economic status, and identity of the families who chose to discard certain pieces during various moments of occupation at Annadel Farms. The assemblage voices a multiplicity of tastes, choices, and behaviors that can be associated with individuals inhabiting the site, and it is through the interactions between these individuals that collective, negotiated identities are formed. The material culture associated with the site provides an aspect of these identities, a glimpse into the lives of the Coney family as they made Annadel Farms their home.

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