

# FROM PRESIDIO TO POST: RECENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES OF THE SPANISH, MEXICAN, AND AMERICAN PERIODS AT THE PRESIDIO OF SAN FRANCISCO

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## ABSTRACT

The Presidio of San Francisco, occupied as a military post under three different flags for the past 218 years, provides a unique opportunity for archaeological investigation of military history and social and cultural change. Archaeological monitoring and subsequent field investigations undertaken by Woodward-Clyde Consultants in 1993 and 1994 have resulted in the discovery of archaeological features and deposits from the early Spanish-Colonial occupation of the post through the Mexican, early American, and Civil War periods. These discoveries have served to verify and enrich the written historic record as well as to raise pressing questions about settlement, architectural, and land-use practices during the first century of the post's occupation by European and American forces. This paper analyzes, by historic period, the relevance of the archaeological deposits, features, and artifacts which have been encountered to our understanding of the Presidio's history.

## Introduction

The Presidio of San Francisco is the site of a former military post located on the northern tip of the San Francisco peninsula. Military forces continuously occupied the Presidio from 1776 until its recent transfer to the National Park Service in 1994. First held by the Spanish, then Mexican, and finally United States military, the Presidio's early history spans the conquest and settlement of California by European and Euroamerican peoples. The Presidio of San Francisco was both a crossroads for cultural contact and change and simultaneously an enforcer of cultural and political borders. Study of its history provides a unique opportunity for investigation of military and political history as well as the dynamics of social and cultural change.

Recent archaeological investigations have illuminated aspects of the Presidio's early history, and raised new questions about settlement, architectural, and land use practices during the first 150 years of the post's occupation. This paper analyzes, by historic period, the contribution of the recently discovered archaeological deposits, features, and artifacts to knowledge of the Presidio's history.

## Project Background

Since 1987, Woodward-Clyde Consultants has been involved in management of the Presidio's cultural resources as part of the Partners in Preservation Program, a cooperative effort of the U.S. Army, Army Corps of Engineers, the National Park Service, and various historic preservation groups and consulting firms. Identification of historic archaeological remains has been a focus of numerous archaeological background stud-

ies, field inventories, monitoring programs, and test excavations undertaken by Woodward-Clyde.

In 1993, these investigations were rewarded when archaeological monitors discovered ceramic sherds, clay roof tile fragments, and an associated stone wall foundation feature during removal of an underground storage tank. Since that time, Woodward-Clyde has conducted ten archaeological investigations to assess this discovery and identify related deposits and features. This research has been conducted as part of several infrastructure improvement and environmental remediation projects, and has employed both conventional ground-disturbing excavations and remote sensing investigations. Additionally, on-going public participation and education programs have been incorporated into the field investigations.

Analysis of the materials collected through these field investigations is still underway (Benté and Voss n.d.; Cross n.d.; Voss and Benté n.d.a; Benté and Voss n.d.b). Likewise, additional field investigations are planned in the near future. As with all archaeological investigations, the findings presented in this paper are provisional and may be altered by subsequent discoveries. Regardless, the data gathered to date represent the first historic archaeological research undertaken at the Presidio of San Francisco. By highlighting those deposits and features that have provided the most information about development of the Presidio, this paper synthesizes archaeological findings with the written historic record to provide an overview of the Presidio's first 100 years. Historic background and archaeological findings are presented in three main segments: the Spanish-Colonial and Mexican periods, the Early American period, and the Civil War period.

## Spanish-Colonial (1776-1822) and Mexican (1822-1846) Periods

### Historic Background

The Spanish-Colonial Presidio de San Francisco represented one of the fundamental elements of the tripartite colonial settlement system employed throughout the northern Spanish borderlands and Alta California. Presidios were fortified military garrisons providing military protection to Spanish-Colonial settlements. Between 1769 and 1782, the Spanish constructed four presidios in Alta California, at San Diego, San Francisco, Monterey, and Santa Barbara. A second element was made up of a string of missions, the religious settlements of the system constructed between San Diego and Sonoma. The third element was the pueblos, consisting of two civil settlements located at Los Angeles and San Jose. Together, the missions, pueblos, and presidios formed the three pillars supporting Spanish-Colonial exploration and occupation of Alta California.

Prior to occupation by the Spanish, the northern end of the San Francisco Peninsula was the traditional territory of the Ramaytush, an ethnic and linguistic sub-group of the Ohlone (Costanoan) (Levy 1978). They were displaced beginning in 1776, when Capitan Juan de Anza founded the Presidio de San Francisco, and Mission San Francisco de Asis (Mission Dolores) was established a few miles to the southeast.

Initially de Anza sited the Presidio in a cold, windy, sand-blown spot called Punta de Cantil Blanco, which is now the site of the southern abutment of the Golden Gate Bridge. However, after de Anza's departure to New Spain (present-day Mexico), second-in-command Jose Joaquin Moraga selected a more protected site—the area today known as the Parade Ground—for the actual construction of the Presidio's main quadrangle (Langelier and Rosen 1992:10-11). As is typical of Spanish-Colonial presidios, the Presidio de San Francisco was a rectangular compound comprised of long, narrow buildings surrounding a central plaza.

Although the general vicinity of the Spanish-Colonial fort was known through the historic record, its exact location was unknown. The only known scaled plan of the Presidio is a map drawn by Comandante Hermengildo Sal in 1792. The Sal plan depicts a quadrangle measuring 116 *varas* (319 feet) [1 *vara* = ap. 33 inches] north-south and 120 *varas* (330 feet) east-west, and open to the eastern side (Langelier and Rosen 1992: 33). This plan was used to predict the extent of the former Presidio quadrangle, and the Daughters of the American Revolution placed historic markers at the approximate corners in 1926.

### Discovery of the Spanish-Colonial Fort

The first indication that archaeological remains of the Spanish-Colonial Presidio might exist were a few Majolica and Galera ceramic sherds observed during sewer repairs in the rear yards of the Funston Avenue Officers Quarters located on the eastern edge of the Parade Ground. Because the Officers Quar-

ters are located more than 150 feet east of the predicted location of the Presidio quadrangle, the ceramic sherds were assumed to represent casual household waste disposal outside the fort itself.

However, a few months later the removal of a small underground storage tank in the rear of Officers Quarters 12 revealed a concentration of serpentinite stones, clay roof tile fragments, and more Majolica ceramic sherds. The location of the discovery is shown on Figure 1. Excavation of the feature revealed that the stones were a typical Spanish-Colonial wall foundation, composed of angular and subangular serpentinite stones of varied sizes set into a narrow linear trench, extending slightly above the historic grade as indicated by adobe melt (a mass of amorphous clay with some organic content, which results from the breakdown of structures composed of adobe bricks) and clay tile fragments above and to the side of the foundation. Additional excavation undertaken to assess the extent of the feature identified two parallel north-south trending stone wall foundations, measuring 191 *varas* (526 feet) long. The wall foundations corner at their northern ends and continue to the west. Three internal east-west trending partition wall foundations were also identified.

This complex of features appears to represent the eastern front and northeast corner of the Presidio de San Francisco main quadrangle. Further excavation has identified remains of the western and northern fronts of the quadrangle as well. These findings contrast sharply with the 1792 Sal plan: the stone wall-foundations indicate a quadrangle measuring 191 *varas* (526 feet) north-south and 175 *varas* (480 feet) east-west, covering an area twice as large as the quadrangle in the Sal plan and closed on the eastern side (see Figure 1). In sum, while the southwest corner of the quadrangle and the alignment of the western side conform to the Sal plan, the quadrangle is substantially larger and extends farther to the north and east than predicted.

### Analysis of Architectural Findings

These findings lend themselves to two possible explanations. The dimensions indicated on the Sal plan could be erroneous—although it seems highly unlikely that the Comandante of the Presidio would be so grossly mistaken about the size and configuration of the fort under his command.

Alternatively, subsequent to 1792, the Presidio quadrangle could have been enlarged to the north and east, the former north front dismantled, and the eastern front completed. It is possible that expansion of the Presidio quadrangle and completion of the eastern side could have been undertaken to accommodate the 1776 arrival of the Catalonian Volunteers, a special infantry unit dispatched from Spain to enhance Spanish presence in Alta California.

In the year prior to the Catalonian Volunteers' arrival, Governor Diego de Borica visited the Presidio de San Francisco and recommended that the fort, which had been severely damaged by gales and earthquakes, be abandoned and completely rebuilt in a new location. While this proposal was denied, addi-

tional funding was allocated to construct quarters for the newly arrived Catalonian troops. (Langelier and Rosen 1992:45-6). It appears that this construction effort was on-going, and while it may have begun as early as 1797, the presence of occasional clay tile roof fragments in the foundations themselves suggests that construction continued into the early 1800s when tule thatch roofs were replaced by roof tile.

The theory that the Presidio quadrangle was enlarged sometime after 1792 is also supported by the discovery of a borrow pit in the northern portion of the site. The pit had been excavated to a depth of more than six feet below historic grade, and subsequently filled with debris dating to the Spanish-Colonial period. Presumably excavated to provide clay for the construction of adobe bricks, the borrow pit is located outside the borders of the Sal plan quadrangle, but within the borders of the quadrangle identified through archaeological excavation. It seems highly unlikely that the borrow pit would have been excavated within the central plaza of the Presidio quadrangle and then used as an open dump. It appears that the borrow pit was excavated for use in construction of the original quadrangle, and was used as a dump site while it was located outside the Presidio gates.

To test this hypothesis, remote sensing investigations using ground penetrating radar and electromagnetic soil conductivity testing attempted to locate evidence of the old north wall suggested by the Sal plan. While the adobe wall itself would have been dismantled upon expansion of the quadrangle, stones from the subsurface portion of the wall foundation could have been left in place. However, the remote sensing investigations did not yield any evidence of extant remains of the old north wall.

In sum, further excavation is necessary to determine the presence or absence of an "early-stage" quadrangle conforming to the dimensions of the Sal plan. Similarly, later historic accounts of the Presidio de San Francisco, from the 1820s on, suggest that in the late Spanish-Colonial and Mexican periods the Presidio fell into disrepair and numerous structures were built outside the quadrangle walls. Additional investigations both within and beyond the quadrangle will assist in establishing a sequence of construction and land use practices, and further clarify the relationship between architectural changes at the Presidio and specific historic events.

#### Analysis of Non-architectural Artifacts and Features

Investigation of the Spanish-Colonial component of the site has focused on the identification of architectural remains and, with the exception of the borrow pit described above, no stratigraphically intact depositional features have been identified. Artifacts from broadcast and casual waste deposits have been found throughout the site and represent the broad range of activities undertaken at the Presidio de San Francisco.

The ceramic assemblage consists predominantly of Mexican Galera and Majolica sherds. Both Puebla Blue-on-White and Aranama traditions are represented in the assemblage. Some fragments of locally produced wheelware and low-fired

earthenware have also been found, as well as Chinese-export porcelains, including one chipped disk that may have been used as a gaming piece. Flints and strike-a-lites have also been found, along with various corroded metal hardware remnants. The only artifacts possibly related to Native Californian presence at the site are fragments of two groundstone bowls. Even these may be Mexican in origin. Analysis of faunal materials is currently underway, but a cursory inspection of the assemblage has indicated that both terrestrial and sea mammals are represented.

### **Early American Period (1846-1861)**

#### Historic Background

In July 1846 twelve men led by Captain John Charles Fremont crossed the San Francisco Bay from Sausalito and first claimed the Presidio de San Francisco for the United States Government. By March 1847, the Presidio was occupied by a garrison of ten officers and 164 enlisted men of the 7th New York Volunteers. United States soldiers occupied the remaining portions of the Spanish-Colonial quadrangle, and began to construct wooden barracks as needed. Discovery of gold near Sacramento lured most of the volunteers from the post, and in early 1848 the post's enlisted rolls were reduced to twenty men. Replacement troops were provided in late 1849, although some desertion continued through the 1850s.

The role of United States troops at the Presidio during the early American period was initially to ensure political stability in California and later to participate in the so-called "Indian campaigns" of the late 1850s. Presidio troops participated in campaigns against Pomos in California, Paiutes in Nevada, and coastal tribes in Washington. On the local front, Presidio troops protected the military reservations in the Bay Area from squatters and claimants, and began to replace the remnants of the adobe quadrangle with wooden structures (Thompson and Woodbridge 1992: 5-9).

#### Archaeological Findings

Two deposits dating to the early American period have been identified at the Presidio of San Francisco, both located on the western edge of the former Spanish-Colonial quadrangle. The first of these is a privy pit located immediately adjacent to the exterior wall foundation in the northwest corner of the Presidio quadrangle. Black glass, wine, and soda bottles found in the privy were manufactured between 1840 and 1861. Leather and cloth fragments, some ceramic fragments, and numerous tobacco pipes were also recovered. The location of the pit confirms historic accounts of early American use of the abandoned adobe buildings that comprised the Spanish-Colonial quadrangle.

The other feature, located in Pershing Square fifty feet west of the former Spanish-Colonial quadrangle, is a deposit of household wastes including ceramics, glass, miscellaneous personal effects and faunal bone. The deposit is interrupted by dense layers of clay roof tile fragments, presumably from de-

molition of Spanish-Colonial adobes by American troops in the late 1850s. The deposit appears to represent a secondary dump site, with alternating layers of household and demolition waste deposited to fill a shallow natural ravine. The materials recovered from this feature include British export tableware, black glass fragments, and smoking pipe fragments.

Despite extensive excavation on the east side of the Presidio quadrangle, early American period deposits such as these have not been encountered there. This may indicate that use of the former Spanish-Colonial quadrangle by the U.S. Army was concentrated in the western and northern side.

## Civil War Period (1861-1865)

### Historic Background

With the advent of the Civil War, the Presidio of San Francisco took the role of ensuring California's loyalty to the Union cause and maintaining peace and order. It served as a recruiting and training station for California Volunteers and enlisted troops prior to their transfer to the eastern battle fronts. As a result, the reservation grew from a small frontier outpost to a substantial coastal army post capable of housing over 1,500 officers and enlisted troops. As the number of military personnel increased, so did the need for support services. In 1862 the Army constructed nine wood-frame, one-story laundresses' quarters, containing a total of thirty-eight rooms and six separate kitchens. Two more laundresses' quarters were constructed in 1864-65. All were built to the west of the enlisted barracks (located along the former alignment of the western side of the Presidio quadrangle) across a ravine (Thompson and Woodbridge 1992:23, 26-7). Although the role played by military personnel during the Civil War is relatively well documented in the historic record, the lives and contributions of civilian laborers residing on military reservations are less well known.

### Archaeological Findings

The remnants of a privy pit/kitchen waste pit were discovered during storm drain repairs near the historic location of the third northernmost laundresses' quarters. Although this feature had been disturbed by previous utility installations, a portion of the pit remained intact. Utilitarian white improved earthenware sherds, black glass bottle fragments, and faunal remains were recovered from exposed portions of the pit. The disturbed nature of the pit and small artifact sample taken during recordation of the feature limit the information that can be obtained from this find. However, this discovery indicates that other Civil War period features may be present in the vicinity. If these deposits are encountered, their analysis may provide valu-

able insights into the lives of civilian, predominantly female, workers residing on a military post during the Civil War era.

## Summary and Conclusions

The archaeological discoveries described above have added greatly to the understanding of the development of the Presidio of San Francisco from 1776 to 1865. In only two years, extensive data have been gathered that have both challenged and enriched the historic record. That this research has been accomplished through a flexible, cost-effective research program that has harnessed the opportunities provided by infrastructure and remediation projects is a significant accomplishment second only to the importance of the discoveries themselves.

By far the greatest information gathered to date has been with respect to the middle period of Spanish-Colonial rule, from the 1790s through the early 1800s. Discovery of the larger Presidio quadrangle is illustrative of the fact that only archaeological research can identify and address certain gaps in the written and archival historic record. Further investigations undertaken to locate additional architectural remains both within and beyond the main quadrangle will, it is hoped, add to the understanding of the Presidio's development and the relationship of these changes to larger historical events. Likewise, analysis of American period features will continue to enrich the historic record with respect to the early American occupation of the Presidio and its subsequent evolution into a major Army post.

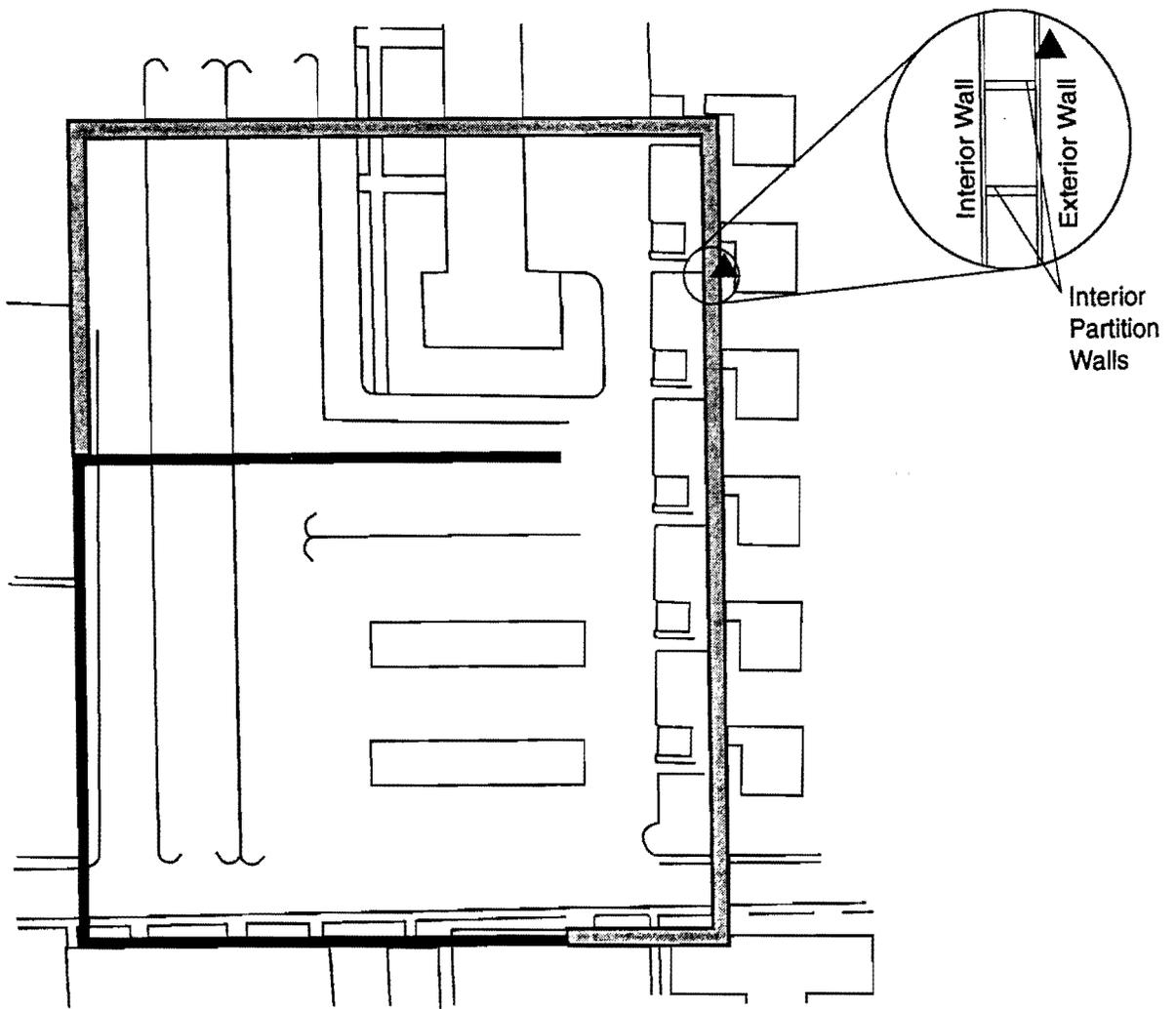
## Notes

Research undertaken for this paper was conducted as part of the Partners in Preservation program, a cooperative effort by the Army Corps of Engineers, the United States Army, the National Park Service and Woodward-Clyde Consultants. Vance Benté of Woodward-Clyde served as Principal Investigator for all phases of research undertaken at the Presidio. His guidance and assistance in preparation of this paper have been invaluable. Sally Salzman Morgan, also of Woodward-Clyde, generously provided editorial assistance.

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LEGEND

-  Sal's 1792 plan
-  Presidio configuration subsequent to 1796
-  Current Presidio of San Francisco Buildings and Streets
-  Location of tank removal

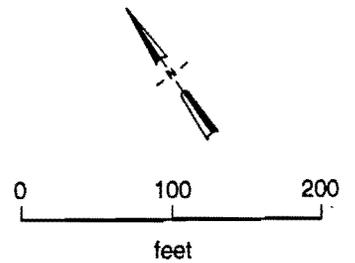


Figure 1. Comparison of 1792 Sal Plan and Archaeological Findings.