

**LINKING PASTS AND PARKS:
ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE PETALUMA ADOBE STATE HISTORIC PARK**

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ABSTRACT

From 1834 to 1848, the Petaluma Adobe was the hub of Mariano G. Vallejo's Rancho Petaluma and the corresponding living and laboring site for at least 600 California Indians. The adobe building and a small parcel of the vast rancho are currently protected in the Petaluma Adobe State Historic Park, offering a unique case for archaeological study. Three issues have been addressed in recent excavation: (1) the construction and use of the Petaluma Adobe building, (2) the nature of culture contact between California Indians and Mexican-Californians, and (3) a comparison of this culture contact situation with the nearby Russian colony at Fort Ross. These results not only provide new insights into 19th-century life on the Mexican rancho but also illustrate archaeology's role in integrating and linking different northern California state parks in the anthropological interpretation of history.

INTRODUCTION

This paper summarizes the last three years of work at the Petaluma Adobe State Historic Park conducted by the University of California, Berkeley. The project is tackling many issues on numerous data fronts, including theoretical considerations of labor, practice theory, and colonialism in the context of 19th-century culture contact between California Indians and Mexican-Californians in northern California. Though most of the archaeological data-collecting has focused on native living and working areas at the park, recent work has also investigated the nature of non-native life inside the Petaluma Adobe itself. In this light, this paper addresses three topics: (1) new information on the construction and use of the Petaluma Adobe building, (2) the nature of culture contact between California Indians and Mexican-Californians, and (3) a brief comparison of this culture contact situation with the nearby Russian colony at Fort Ross.

**HISTORICAL CONTEXT FOR THE
RANCHO PETALUMA**

Today, the Petaluma Adobe State Historic Park, located just northeast of Petaluma in Sonoma County, preserves 41 acres of the once vast 66,600+ acres of the Rancho Petaluma. The Rancho Petaluma was an extensive land grant owned and operated by Mariano G. Vallejo, a prominent Mexican-Californian political and military figure of the 19th century. Vallejo obtained the rancho in 1834, and he maintained the operation until at least 1848 and perhaps into the early 1850s (Hoopes 1965; Tays 1937, 1938). Though Vallejo supervised the Rancho Petaluma property, he actually lived with his family in the nearby settlement of Sonoma.

The namesake for the park is the extant Petaluma Adobe structure that served as the center of rancho activity. The Petaluma Adobe was one of the largest of its type in Alta California, standing two stories tall with an enclosed quadrangle (Treganza 1958; Gebhardt 1962), redwood shakes on the roof, and at least three associated out-buildings, two of which may have

been corrals (Clemmer 1961; Gebhardt 1962). This quadrangle suffered the ravages of time, and only half of the building currently stands. The Petaluma Adobe served multiple purposes, including residential quarters for Vallejo and his family on their seasonal or special occasion visits to the Rancho Petaluma; housing for the labor overseer and artisans; work rooms for weaving, grinding, leather-working, and other economic pursuits; and storage rooms for grain, hides, and other materials (Hoopes 1965).

Ranchos across California varied in their composition and form, ranging from small family affairs with some livestock and crops to large operations covering many thousands of acres of extensive production of livestock and agricultural goods to supply local residents and to trade with British, American, and Russian vessels and settlements (see Greenwood 1989 for a good summary). Vallejo's Rancho Petaluma was the epitome of the latter. Like many other ranchos, the Rancho Petaluma rode on the heels of mission secularization in California, an event that meant the dissolution of the primary center of culture contact and the dissipation of many native residents to old tribal lands or to nearby secular establishments such as pueblos and private ranchos.

CONSTRUCTION AND USE OF THE PETALUMA ADOBE

The first issue to be discussed is the archaeological study of the Petaluma Adobe interior. In the summer of 1998, a Berkeley archaeological team had the opportunity to excavate inside the historic Petaluma Adobe structure (SON-363/H). As part of the California State Building Seismic Program, the Petaluma Adobe was slated to undergo structural stabilization with the placement of steel I-beams and concrete footings at four locations inside the historic structure (Figure 1). Though the seismic retrofit plans dictated the trench locations and dimensions, the trenches have provided new archaeological insights into the Petaluma Adobe's structural and cultural history (Silliman 1999c). No one had ever conducted systematic excavation beneath the extant Adobe's floor, though archaeologists in the 1950s and 1960s excavated

the now-deteriorated eastern half (Gebhardt 1962; Treganza 1958).

Because the artifacts are currently undergoing analysis, discussion here must be brief and preliminary. The temporal span of artifacts ranged from the mid-1900s with insulated wire, candy wrappers, and a Lincoln Head penny to the most ancient with chert and obsidian lithics of some antiquity. The lithic materials derived more from a prehistoric site on which the Adobe was constructed than from the production or use of lithics by native workers inside the Adobe. Obsidian hydration confirmed this with periods of Napa obsidian used from 4.1-4.9 microns and from 3.1-3.5 microns. Around 1.4-1.7 microns, Annadel obsidian joined the assemblage.

As for historical materials, relatively few beads and ceramics were recovered, but significant quantities of glass (both vessel and windowpane) and metal items were found. Approximately 220 nails were discovered, including examples of both iron and steel and of machine-cut and wire manufacture. Wood and charcoal dominated. Faunal remains were well represented, though many of these belonged to rodents whose burrowing lives ended inside these Adobe rooms. However, elements of cattle, deer, pig, and horse have been identified thus far in the subfloor room deposits.

In addition to the material culture itself, stratigraphic analysis of the excavated trenches provided a clearer picture of the development of the Adobe (Silliman 1999c). In Trenches 1 and 4, the floor rested on a compact clay-rich deposit the origin of which appears to have little to do with the historic period. Though historical artifacts were found on and within part of this deposit, the layers pre-dated the Adobe by many years. On the other hand, the floor in Trenches 2 and 3 sat on approximately 70 cm of fill, a fill whose composition resembled the yellow-gray clay substrate found at the base of Trenches 1 and 4. This fill, which contained numerous historical artifacts, then rested on an actual buried soil rather than on a compact substrate.

This information indicated that the upper portion of the promontory on which the Petaluma

Adobe sits was shaved off to create a flattened, wide area for construction in the 1830s. The removed hilltop soil was probably used for the adobe brick manufacture. The middle of the Adobe was placed on this "prepared" surface, while the western face was built up on the sloping ground surface of the existing hill. This pointed to not only considerable planning and labor investment but also the intent, even at the very outset, to construct a building of enormous proportions. This would account for why the hilltop was leveled just to build one wing of the quadrangle on a slope since that option required stone retaining walls and fill to bring the room to floor grade.

CULTURE CONTACT AT THE RANCHO PETALUMA

The second issue is the culture contact archaeology of the Petaluma Adobe State Historic Park. Beginning in 1996, a multi-year archaeological project began in the Petaluma Adobe park to study the culture contact experience of Native Americans with Mexican-Californians in the 19th century. The importance of the ranchos for culture contact studies stems from the presence of large numbers of Native American laborers (Silliman 1998, 1999b). For the larger ranchos such as the Rancho Petaluma, the land owners and labor overseers supervised and controlled the agriculture, livestock, and manufactured goods, but the daily labors were provided almost solely by the indigenous population. These individuals worked in the rancho regime for a number of reasons, including voluntary participation for access to food and material items, coercion through loss of land and resources, and forced labor as prisoners of military raids.

Although this culture contact experience occurred rather late in colonial North America, the number of historical documents on the specifics of colonial-native interactions is small. For instance, there were only occasional statements about approximate numbers of native people working at the Rancho Petaluma and infrequent observations made by visitors and residents in the Petaluma region (e.g., Davis 1929; Vallejo 1941), but there

were no censuses, no records of laborer provisions, and no indications of worker geographical or cultural origins nor living areas on the rancho (Silliman 1999b). The lack of documents foregrounds archaeology, and this potential has been explored through three seasons of archaeological fieldwork. Using a combination of geophysical survey, shovel test survey, surface testing units, and test pit excavations, an area was discovered that held significant clues to native work and residential life on the rancho (Figure 2). This area was investigated in 1997 and 1998 through trench and block excavations, covering 48 square meters.

The midden area contained high densities of refuse materials, relatively homogenous distributions of those materials, fragmented nature of all assemblages, and *no* discrete features. Artifacts included traditional historical material such as glass bottle shards, ceramic sherds, and metal objects, but it also contained glass trade beads, obsidian and chert artifacts, incised bird bone, ground stone fragments, and shellfish remains. Glass beads and lithics numbered over 600 each, derived from surface testing units and from only 6 1-x-1-m units. Glass numbered around 3,000 pieces, but historical ceramics only about 300. Over 400 nails were located, in addition to numerous other metal objects. The midden also produced large numbers of faunal remains, many highly fragmented. Over 47,000 bones and bone fragments were retrieved, but <2% will be identifiable to species.

The location of the major block and trench excavations produced several discrete features including shallow pits of heavily burned and fragmented faunal remains, fire-cracked rock spalls, and other unburned artifacts. In addition to these small features, two large ones were uncovered. One involved a large processing or cooking feature composed of numerous stream cobbles overlaying a band of charcoal and fire-cracked rock slivers, and another was a large accumulation of bone refuse. Covering approximately 6-7 square meters, the bone refuse feature involved primarily unburned skeletal elements of cattle, though bones of deer, small mammals, birds, and fish have also been identified to date. Mixed within these faunal remains were

shellfish fragments; historical artifacts such as glass beads, nails, ceramic sherds, and bottle fragments; ground stone pieces; and obsidian and chert artifacts. Though preliminary results in the spring of 1997 seemed to indicate the presence of a cobble foundation of a large adobe building (Silliman 1998), subsequent excavation has broadened the exposure of this feature and shown it to be of probable fluvial origin.

The current interpretation is that the block and midden areas represent daily refuse from native activities on the rancho. Though these may derive partly from required duties on the rancho such as cattle butchery, the refuse deposits speak mainly to residential activities and domestic consumption. No residences were recovered, though they are hypothesized to have been close by. Of particular interest is the mixture of traditional native items with the standard artifacts of the historical colonial period, indicating an integration of both into 19th-century native lives.

COMPARISON TO FORT ROSS STATE HISTORIC PARK

One of the most important research opportunities offered by the Petaluma Adobe State Historic Park— the third one to be considered— is the comparison with the culture contact research at Fort Ross State Historic Park on the Sonoma County coast (Lightfoot et al. 1993, 1997, 1998). The two colonial settlements overlapped from 1834 to 1841, and Vallejo interacted on many levels with the Russian officials at Colony Ross (Hoopes 1965; Tays 1937, 1938). The most striking similarity between the situations is the use of Native Americans as a labor force for colonial purposes.

Similarities between the two parks abound. The most important is the archaeological focus on the pluralistic nature of the colonial community. Though excavations have focused primarily on native living areas, these are contextualized within the broader social milieu of the colonial settlement, incorporating the issues of intermarriage and labor regimentation. The culture contact archaeology at both of these localities has uncovered and subsequently studied large refuse deposits from

native activities. These deposits contained historical material culture, traditional native items, faunal remains, and extensive concentrations of fire-cracked rock. Both projects have located substantial mixture of native and European material culture in contexts that are mostly, if not solely, native-generated. As such, they are providing insights into the use of these items in the negotiation of old and new identities (e.g., Lightfoot et al. 1998). Similarly, the faunal assemblages for both sites are large and diverse, reflecting an incorporation of introduced domestic animals and traditional wild fauna into native practices.

The contrast between these parks is equally significant. At Fort Ross, the case has been made for native recycling of historical material culture as a raw material (Silliman 1997). That is, glass was fashioned into projectile points and scrapers, while ceramics were modified into preforms and bead blanks. It appears that obsidian artifacts also underwent considerable recycling given their presence in historical deposits with larger-than-historical hydration rims (Lightfoot and Silliman 1997). On the other hand, there were substantial quantities of historic-period obsidian at the Rancho Petaluma (Silliman 1999a). Though some hydration rims date later than 1.4 microns, the vast majority fall solidly between 0.8 and 1.2 microns. Interestingly, all of these obsidian items are in good association with historical artifacts and features. It is clear that the Petaluma Adobe native residents maintained access to obsidian sources (Silliman 1999a), while those at Fort Ross may have lost it (see Lightfoot et al. 1991:116; Farris 1989:492). In a related vein, there seems to be considerably less worked glass at Petaluma. Several pieces of glass show evidence of intentional flaking or look similar to lithic debitage, but no projectile points of bottle glass were recovered. Moreover, there is currently no evidence for modification of ceramics. The need or desire to modify colonial material culture may have been obviated by the continued access to obsidian.

For more subtle contrast, the Petaluma excavations have produced several hundred more beads than did the Fort Ross excavations (see Ross 1997), but the Petaluma beads show more

homogeneity in numbers, though not necessarily in varieties, than the Fort Ross assemblage. For instance, white/gray beads occupy approximately 67% of total glass beads at Petaluma, but only 33% at Fort Ross. Red beads, including red-on-green and red-on-white, comprised only approximately 17% of Petaluma's beads but 23% of Fort Ross'. Correspondingly, the percentage of green, black, and blue beads was much lower at Petaluma than at Fort Ross. The predominance of white glass beads at the Petaluma Adobe park is interesting, and it may relate to their incorporation into the clamshell disk bead economy. Although hundreds of white glass beads were recovered in Petaluma, less than 5 shell beads were found. Given the proximity of this site to the Coast Miwok center of bead production at Bodega and the wealth of other native items, this absence may indicate that glass beads were viable substitutes for shell beads in the historic-period exchange system.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, many state parks in northern California contain numerous and significant prehistoric sites, but equally important, they also protect important areas of historical colonial interaction and culture contact. Though this paper centered on the Petaluma Adobe State Historic Park and its comparison with Fort Ross State Historic Park, these are only part of the suite of parks that preserve aspects of 18th- and 19th-century culture contact. The archaeological and historical interpretations of these two parks must, by necessity, articulate with other state parks, such as the Sonoma Mission, Olompali, Willow Creek, and Bodega Bay. Not only does each park and its archaeology insert an additional window into the wall of history that stretches across northern California, but also they provide unique contexts that can benefit from intersite, and interpark, comparisons.

The goal of linking pasts and parks is not just an archaeological one; it relates directly to the objectives of the state parks. By conducting long-term research projects in state parks and telescoping between local excavation and regional historical contexts, each park receives extensive

material with which to build, expand, or even change its public interpretation of history. As such, archaeological materials provide new and often unexpected fuel to invigorate efforts at public outreach, and they contribute to management plans for preserving cultural resources.

NOTES

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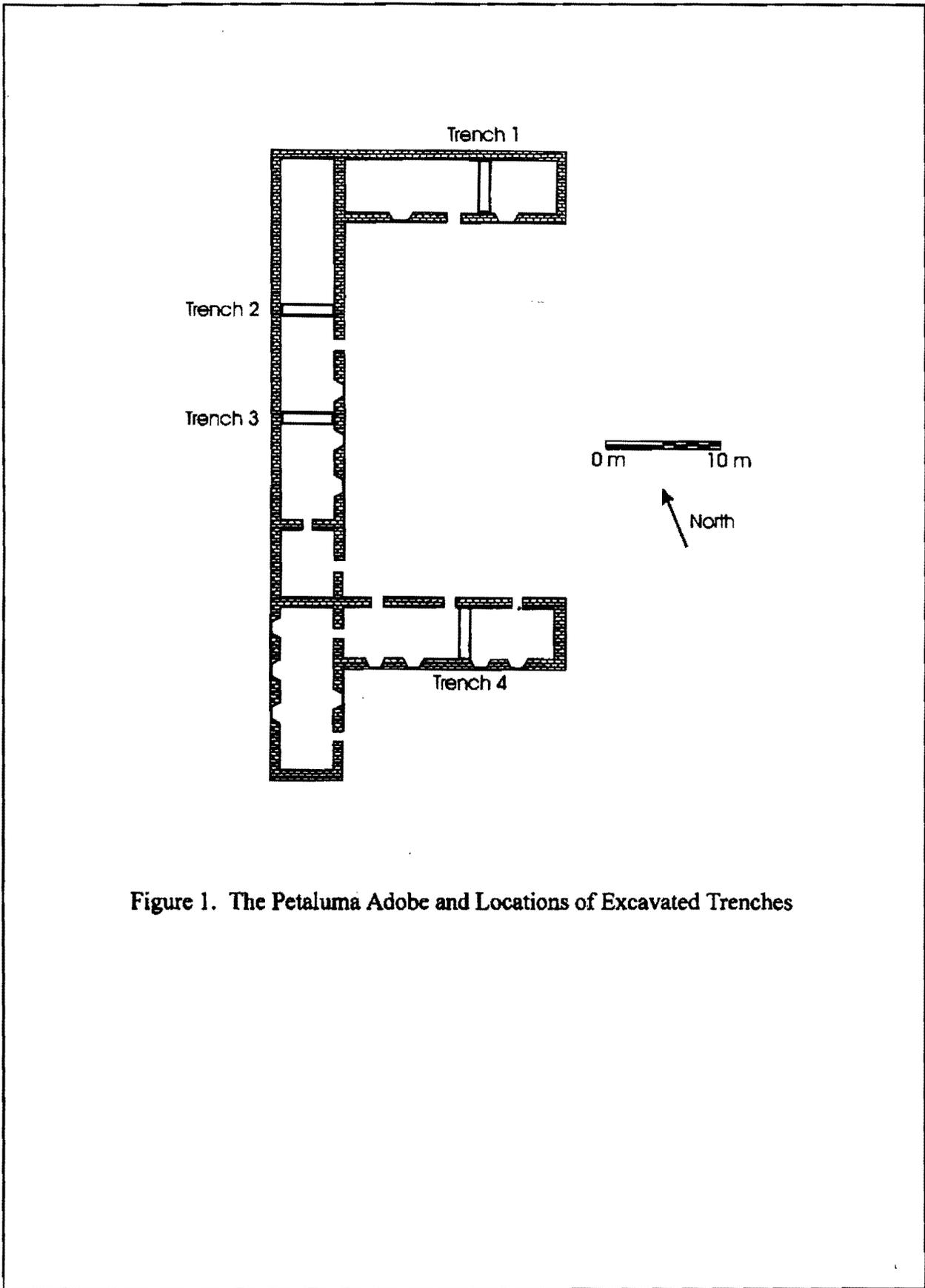


Figure 1. The Petaluma Adobe and Locations of Excavated Trenches

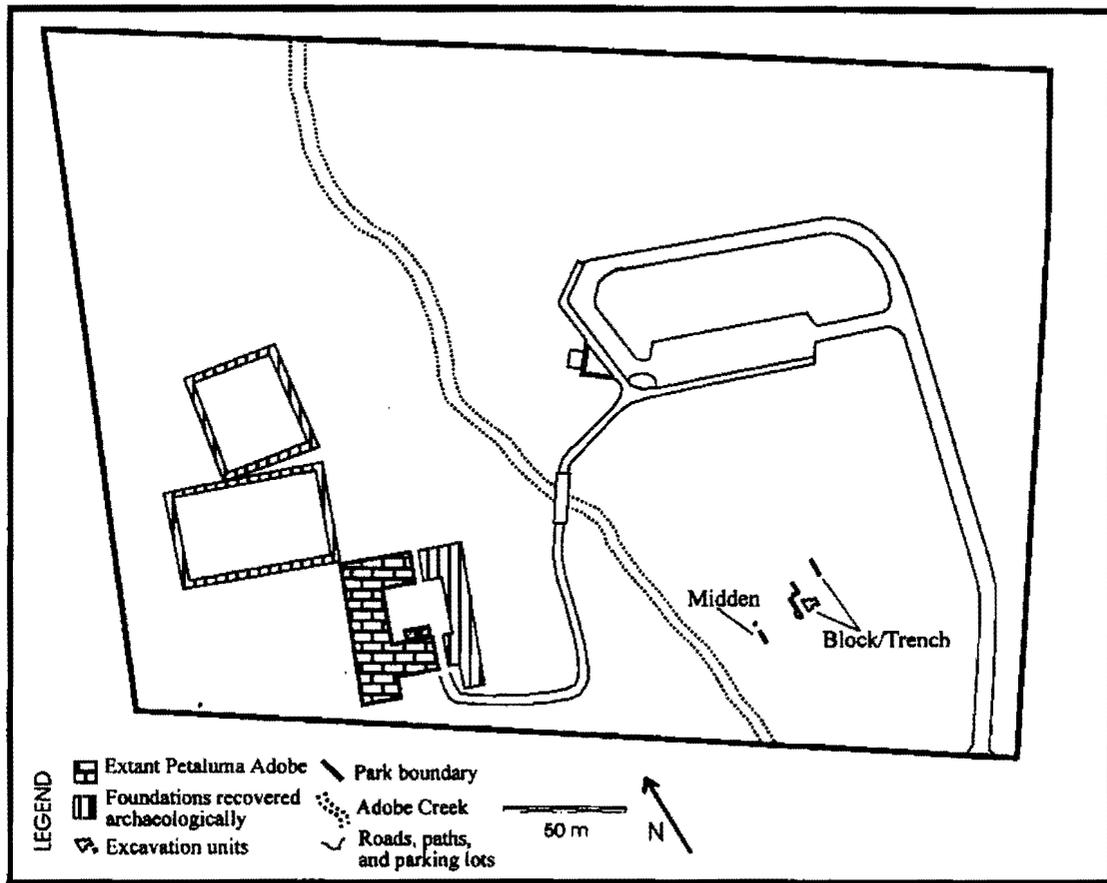


Figure 2. The Petaluma Adobe State Historic Park.