AN OVERVIEW OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT THE BANDINI ADOBE/COSMOPOLITAN HOTEL (CA-SDI-17,862), OLD TOWN SAN DIEGO STATE HISTORIC PARK

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The extent, goals, and methods of archaeological investigations are reviewed. Stratigraphic associations with architectural features revealed historic occupational surfaces, building and renovation phases, and natural flood deposits that set the context for archaeological discoveries and interpretations.

The Casa de Bandini/Cosmopolitan Hotel project was very much what we call in the Old World an “Architect’s Dig.” That is, the subsurface investigations for the most part served the needs and priorities of the architectural rehabilitation (Schaefer et al. 2012; Stiegler et al. 2012). These included the following goals:

1. To gain a better understanding of building phases and construction methods by exposing continuous and cold joins in foundations as well as foundation construction methods.

2. To assess the accuracy of and interpret the Vallejo Plan of the Casa de Bandini that Vallejo drew from memory many decades after he saw it completed in 1830 (Figures 1-2); also, to interpret later depictions of the adobe and the Cosmopolitan Hotel.

3. To discriminate and assess the integrity of archaeological deposits from the various periods of construction and occupation.

4. To satisfy the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation regarding monitoring subsurface disturbance and recovery of archaeological information that would be lost due to demolition and construction.

Virtually all 55 excavation units were judgmentally placed and sized to meet these goals (Figure 3). Test units were strategically located to answer specific questions about the building sequence, foundations, and associated stratigraphy. These included 10 units around the exterior and eight inside the building. Units were placed at interior room corners or under evidence of adobe wall joins, where rooms were known to have been added over time, and at the locations where doorways were suspected to be either original to the first Bandini phase, added later in the Bandini era, during the Cosmopolitan Hotel renovation, or sealed up. Another set of units were designed to expose foundations of now-missing wings and interior cross walls from the original Bandini Adobe and that had been removed due to earthquakes and floods or when the building was converted into the Cosmopolitan Hotel. In all these cases, the stone foundations were preserved and remain under the modern floor finishes. In fact, we would estimate that 90 percent of the subsurface archaeological features and occupational stratigraphy remain preserved to this day, after investigations were completed.

Another set of units were placed specifically where subsurface disturbances were expected, such as the elevator shaft and utilities trenches. Finally, some mechanical exploratory trenches were placed in the courtyard area to determine if subsurface features existed; some were predicted, and this would be the only opportunity in the next century to investigate these areas. Some impacts also were expected from the new patio dining area construction. One diagonal trench was dug across the courtyard so that the best opportunity could be afforded to intersect patio walls. Where positive results were obtained, additional test units were placed in areas to assess the depth and stratigraphic relationship of these features. We also placed trenches where the new kitchen wing was to be constructed to assess what impacts might ensue from its construction. Those units were largely negative.
Figure 1. Plan of the Bandini Adobe at its completion in 1829, drawn by Guadalupe Mariano Vallejo as remembered many years later; project north is to the right (Bancroft Library).
Figure 2. Schematic of the Vallejo plan, with Spanish transcriptions and English translations.
SUMMARY OF DISCOVERIES

Missing Wall Foundations

Virtually all the missing walls and foundations of the Vallejo Plan were found to exist in foundation remains (Figure 4). In fact, the early architectural and habitation remains from the Bandini era were amazingly well-preserved, despite all the many modifications of later decades, especially the removal of cross walls to enlarge the first-floor rooms when the building was converted to the Cosmopolitan Hotel. The remains include positions of the cross walls in Room 101 and the original cross walls that divided Rooms 103 and 104 (Figure 5). Portions of the missing north wing foundations also

Figure 3. Excavation units, foundations, and features.
Figure 4. North wing foundations in relation to other excavated features and foundations.
Figure 5. (top) Cross wall foundations in Room 104; (bottom) western cross wall foundation in Room 104, view west.
were found, including foundations of the despensa or storage room at the end of the north wing and a hint of the zaguan or original entranceway (Figures 6-7). A complex intersection of features in Test Serape 1 indicates modifications in the Seeley era, including what appear to be a brick-filled French drain or perhaps the shed that replaced the north wing (see Figure 7).

**Early Courtyard Wall Foundations**

Deeply buried walls or foundations were found in the courtyard area, encased and overlaid by flood-deposited silts and clay. Apparently some construction, perhaps garden walls, preceded the Bandini Adobe as initial historic use of the area, and that construction may derive from agricultural plots of the Presidio occupants.

**Bandini Foundations: Adaptation to Natural Surface Contours and Water Runoff**

Another revelation was how Bandini took advantage of the naturally sloping topography to accentuate the imposing appearance of the adobe (Figures 8-9). Massive exposed stucco-covered foundations were built up on the western plaza side to create a level platform for the adobe, while very superficial foundations were laid on the higher east side. This gave the impression of a raised building, almost like a palace mount; anyone on the plaza could look up at the imposing edifice, seemingly higher than Bandini’s neighbor and in-laws in the Estudillo Adobe. Superficial foundations or no foundations were found for the two-room expansion of the southern wing, an expedient approach to the flat grade at this end or to diminishing fiscal resources of the later Bandini era. Bandini’s builders also constructed a cobble skirt around the perimeter base, apparently to deflect runoff from the roof and protect the adobe from water wicking (see Figures 8-10), a problem that was very apparent from the numerous repairs over time observed in the basal adobe courses.

**The Seeley Cistern**

A large Seeley-era brick cistern (Figure 10) was found at the north end of the Mason Street wing, perhaps fed by runoff from the roof, but also by the well-documented windmill that was built at the eastern end of the building (Wolf and Schaefer 2011).

**Bandini-Era Living and Working Surfaces**

Substantial occupational levels from the Bandini era were found in Rooms 104 and 105, which both retained their dirt floors and were protected by later wood and concrete floorings. Some of the richest artifact-bearing deposits came from these loose carbonaceous soils covering compact native clays. The remarkably preserved kitchen floors of Room 105 and the associated drain system were among the most informative contexts for their abundant Native American ceramics and milling tools, household debris, and faunal assemblages (Figure 11). Room 103 was the only room with a wooden floor in the Bandini era, and it bore occupation material that fell through the floorboards on top of large amounts of fill, to raise the level before the wood floor could be installed. Test trenches in the west wall bore remains of the floor joists that were locked into the foundation (Figure 12).

**Artifact Collections**

Over 37,000 artifacts were recovered during more than two years of excavations, from the testing, data recovery and monitoring phases. These include Native American ceramics and milling tools; Mexican milling equipment; Euro-American, Asian, and Mexican ceramics; glass; ammunitions and small arms; tobacco-smoking equipment; toys; pencils and slates; buttons of shell, bone, and porcelain; coins from every period; clothing items; religious medallions; glass trade beads and jewelry; sewing equipment; textiles; preserved paper; nails and building elements; and more. The entire collection is curated at the San Diego Archaeology Center, and we expect it will serve as a focus of future search.
Figure 6. Northern wall foundation of the north wing, view east.
Figure 7. Superposition of Bandini- and Seeley-era features in the courtyard, view east. The rectangular brick-filled trench, associated with a Seeley-era shed, intrudes into earlier stone foundations of the Bandini-era despensa from the north wing.

We conclude by saying that it has been a privilege to work on such an important and challenging project with the dedicated staff of IS Architecture, the California Department of Parks and Recreation, Walter Enterprises, and all the subconsultants.

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Wolf, Scott, and Jerry Schaefer

Figure 8. Plastered cobble foundation at the southwest corner in Unit 8. Plaster rubble fill from the 1930 Couts remodel can be seen in the unit profile.
Figure 9. Architectural profile in Unit 8, showing components of cobble foundation, view east.
Figure 10. (top) Cobble skirt with later brick repair in Unit 6, view north; (bottom) Seeley-era brick cistern, view south.
Figure 11. Bandini-era domestic kitchen debris in the drainage trench to the south of Room 105.
Figure 12. Joist holes from the Bandini-era floor in the foundations of Room 103; Trench 12, view west.