

URBAN ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE REGULATORY CONTEXT

by

Marley R. Brown III

Sonoma State University

An Historical Overview

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### AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Although American archaeologists have been excavating cities, or portions of them, for well over a century in many parts of the world, it is only recently that they have recognized the potential of urban archaeology in their own backyard. If interest in the archaeological study of the city in the United States grew rather slowly, it has now achieved almost celebrity status, as witnessed by the recent *Newsweek* article on the subject in their "Lifestyles" section (April 1979). Whether it is Ben Franklin's house in Philadelphia or a scuttled Gold Rush hulk in the fill of downtown San Francisco, the American public is being made aware of the potential importance of cities as archaeological sites. The current visibility of urban archaeology is the product of many factors, not the least of which is the increasingly effective implementation of federal laws pertaining to the preservation of historical and archaeological resources. The Golden Eagle Project is, in part, a response in one California city to these laws. Excavation of this site also reflects the City of Sacramento's commitment to preserving its history in tangible form--a commitment which began before the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. As such, the Golden Eagle Project should be understood from the perspective of both earlier work in historical archaeology and more recent studies undertaken primarily within the regulatory context. When viewed in these terms, this project serves to illustrate not only some of the serious problems attending the present conduct of urban historical archaeology within California and the nation as a whole, but many of the genuine and significant prospects as well.

In a recent review article on the subject of urban archaeology, Bert Salwen (1978) presented an "updated assessment" of work that has been done since 1970. He noted that, although the number of urban-archaeology projects has increased dramatically, the overall significance of the results, as theoretical or substantive contributions to our understanding of processes of urban growth and related social and cultural change, has not yet been demonstrated (Salwen 1978:454). Salwen drew upon examples from the Northeast to support his case, but his assessment holds true for the rest of the country as well, and particularly the Far West and California.

It has been accurately observed many times that historical archaeology has been extremely slow to realize its supposed theoretical potential (Schuyler 1970; South 1977), and most reviewers attribute the lack of progress in theory-building to historical archaeology's close and long-standing association with the restoration-preservationist movement (Schuyler 1976). These observations regarding the general status of historical archaeology are especially true for urban projects, as is evident in the historical development of such work both nation-wide and in California. Until recently, most if not all excavations of urban historic sites were concerned with archaeology in the city, rather than with archaeology of the city (Ingersoll 1971a; Salwen 1973:152). The focus of most investigations has been, and continues to be, the individual site or site complex, often viewed as significant because of its age and architectural

affiliations or its association with important events and persons. Such sites are usually approached as units unto themselves, excavated largely for the purpose of clarifying restoration details, developing site-specific interpretation programs, or simply salvaging archaeological materials prior to their destruction. Often, sites chosen for study do not even relate directly to the period of urbanization, but rather to earlier, colonial-period settlement. This pattern of urban site selection emerged within California as early as the 1930s, with the restoration of Spanish- and Mexican-period adobes and other Spanish colonial settlements now located in urban areas (e.g., San Diego Presidio, Santa Barbara Presidio, Avila Adobe) and continues today.

An informative example of the problems associated with this approach to site selection was provided by Robert Schuyler (1975, 1976) in recent studies of the political context of historical archaeology: the excavation of the Hugo Reid Adobe in Los Angeles. The excavation of this site by William Wallace and his students was carefully done, and the artifactual and historical analysis were exemplary for the period (Wallace and Wallace 1958, 1959, 1961), yet the results were not well-received by those who sponsored the project, because they contradicted their preconceptions of both the man who lived there and the house he lived in. The restoration of the site bears little resemblance to the structure identified by archaeology (Schuyler 1975:189, 1976:30). The results of other restoration-based projects have, of course, provided valuable data regarding the material culture of the Spanish and Mexican period--both architectural and artifactual--as well as information regarding other aspects of colonial Spanish lifeways. Furthermore, the materials recovered from Spanish and Mexican sites located in cities may be profitably compared with data retrieved from rural sites. In many ways, this kind of archaeology in California resembles the work of historical archaeologists in New England who have investigated early colonial sites in what are now large urban areas.

The Hugo Reid Adobe excavation, like many others undertaken in California and the rest of the country, illustrates not only the constraints of pursuing historical archaeology primarily for restoration purposes, but also the shortcomings of the site-specific emphasis, particularly in the urban context. Whether the archaeologist is seeking details regarding an individual site's architectural characteristics or an understanding of an earlier colonial, pre-urban period, the results rarely exemplify what is meant by archaeology of the city. This is not to say that all archaeology associated with restoration has been so limited. In his work at Puddle Dock in Portsmouth, New Hampshire (owned by Strawberry Banke, Inc., a preservation- and restoration-oriented museum), Daniel Ingersoll (1971b) sought to examine the nature of Portsmouth's settlement history using the fill patterns of the former waterway as his data base. More recently, at an adjacent site in Strawberry Banke, Steven Pendery (personal communication 1978) was successful in using data excavated from a single lot, in conjunction with sophisticated documentary and cartographic analysis, to describe Portsmouth's process of growth and pattern of land use since the 17th century. This latter study in particular demonstrates that, to the extent an individual site is both representative and approached with well-defined research goals, it can produce generalizations about the city as a whole.

Another example of deriving behavioral generalizations from urban sites originally excavated for restoration-related or salvage purposes is Gibson's (1979) analysis of trash disposal within New England. Based on evidence accumulated from Plymouth, Boston, and Salem, Massachusetts, and Providence, Rhode Island, as well as historical data pertaining to public health and sanitation, Gibson defined an evolutionary model of trash disposal on historical sites.

The best illustration of integrating previous salvage archaeology, in this case conducted by the Smithsonian Institution in the early 1960s, with more recent problem-oriented research is the Alexandria Urban Archaeology Program in Virginia. Under the direction of Pamela Cressey, the Alexandria Project is clearly setting a standard for the rest of the country to follow in terms of goals, organization, and implementation (Cressey 1978, 1979). Most importantly, this project has developed a research design for the city as a whole and proposed specific strategies for retrieving archaeological and archival data in light of that design.

Little, if any, comparative research on previously excavated collections from urban historical sites has occurred in California, with the notable exception of the State Department of Parks and Recreation's Cultural Resource Management Unit, which has devoted several years to the analysis of collections from sites in Old Sacramento. These efforts and the history behind them have been nicely summarized in a further volume on Old Sacramento (Schulz et al. 1980). Other than this state-sponsored work in Sacramento, urban archaeology explicitly concerned with the Anglo-American period was almost totally lacking in California until the mid-1970s. Some limited salvage work had been accomplished in cities such as San Francisco, where, for example, Anglo-American materials were collected by Arnold Pilling during his career as a graduate student in anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley. Pilling, who later went on to do archaeological work in Detroit, was primarily concerned with acquiring a collection of English and American ceramics which he could compare with materials from other sites. The San Francisco materials were used for typological analysis, first by Pilling (1953) and later by Gordon Grosscup, another Berkeley graduate student (Bennyhoff personal communication 1980). Other historical deposits from San Francisco sites have also been salvaged over the years by students and faculty of San Francisco State College and by personnel of the Maritime Museum, but there are no reports available which describe or analyze these finds.

It has only been since the provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as implemented in the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation regulations (36 CFR 800), were recognized by the federal agencies responsible for urban redevelopment that large-scale projects in urban archaeology were initiated in California and the nation as a whole. Although some archaeology was accomplished in conjunction with the major redevelopment projects of the 1960s, such as the Arizona State Museum's salvage work in Old Tucson under the direction of James Ayres, most of the original urban redevelopment proceeded at the expense of both archaeological and architectural resources (Fleming 1971). While the situation has definitely improved, many federal agencies, and especially the city redevelopment agencies with whom they do business, have been slow to recognize their responsibilities.

Federal historic preservation laws first made their presence felt in California cities in a major way when the City of Ventura's redevelopment agency, with funding assistance from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) undertook archaeological investigations at the site of Mission San Buenaventura, a National Register-eligible property, in 1974-1975. With additional funding provided by a grant from the National Endowment to the Humanities, Roberta Greenwood and Associates were able to investigate a variety of structural features and trash deposits from the Spanish, Anglo, and Chinese occupations of the site. The reports on this work have set a standard by which other urban historical archaeology projects in California may be measured (Greenwood 1975, 1976). It is unfortunate that, since the Buenaventura investigations, there have been no excavations of comparable scope undertaken in areas of urban redevelopment--a result, in part, of a growing recalcitrance on the part of federal agencies and their state and city counterparts to responsibly address the problems of urban historical archaeology. The federal agencies in question, namely HUD, the Urban Mass Transit Authority, and the Environmental Protection Agency, either do not employ archaeologists or rely on staff with little or no expertise in the problems of urban historical archaeology. In most cases, the responsibility of the federal agency is passed down to the grant applicants--the cities themselves--many of whom also do not employ staff with expertise in archaeology.

The problems created by the present compliance posture of those federal agencies funding urban construction can be seen in several recent and ongoing projects within the state. Recent studies undertaken pursuant to the Advisory Council's regulations (36 CFR 800) in San Diego, Los Angeles, San Jose, Richmond, and San Francisco (Wirth Associates 1979, 1980; Cartier et al. 1978; Olmsted et al. 1979) have been concerned with identifying and evaluating both prehistoric and historic cultural resources. In some cases, these projects represent examples of the most sophisticated historical overviews presently being done in the country (see especially Wirth Associates 1979, 1980; Olmsted et al. 1979), but there has been precious little archaeological follow-up, even at the testing stage. Some test excavations have been conducted in San Francisco, most recently in the Wirth Associates second phase of the Potrero 7 Project and in San Diego's Marina/Columbia Redevelopment Area. Other projects, most notably the San Antonio Plaza Project in San Jose and the Yerba Buena Redevelopment Project in San Francisco, have not yet moved to the testing stage. In these latter cases, potentially significant archaeological data have been needlessly lost to bottle collectors. While the reasons for this destruction are varied and complex, they essentially reflect both agency policies regarding their legal responsibility for the identification of National Register-eligible properties and their unwillingness to provide proper guidance to the grant applicants who are held responsible. The result has been that, other than some test excavations in San Francisco and San Diego, the extensive excavation of urban sites as a form of mitigation has not progressed since the 1974-1975 work at Mission San Buenaventura by Greenwood and Associates--that is, until the excavation of the Golden Eagle site.

## PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

The Golden Eagle Project, although selected for investigation by the Sacramento Redevelopment Agency as part of its archaeological study of some 20 blocks using City funds, also had a federal involvement in the form of an Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG). In its initial stages, the compliance procedure outlined in 36 CFR 800 was not followed, but during the course of field work, a compromise was reached with the State Historic Preservation Office, which provided a solution to the problem. A data-recovery program was initiated on the Golden Eagle site which met the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation's "Guidelines for No-Adverse Effect Determinations." Because the site had already been targeted for archaeological study by the Redevelopment Agency, and because both site-specific historical research and an archaeological research design had been completed, the Golden Eagle Project is not entirely comparable with other urban projects undertaken recently in California. The manner in which it was implemented, however, does illustrate many of the problems plaguing all urban archaeological studies being conducted within the regulatory context. At the same time, this project can serve as a basis for recommending solutions to these problems. Problems and solutions relate most directly to the following areas: historical research, research design, and sampling and field techniques.

### Historical Research

Unlike many projects undertaken in relation to redevelopment, a detailed and explicit research design had been prepared for the Golden Eagle site prior to the initiation of field work. This research design was informed both by a thorough knowledge of Sacramento historical archaeology, as well as some site-specific historical research. In addition, the research design provided for some generalization through comparative studies involving sites already excavated in the city (Schulz 1979). Initial test excavations on the J/K/6/7 block revealed, however, that the historical research had not sufficiently accounted for recent impacts to the property, especially during demolition of the hotel itself (see Eisenman, this volume). A study of the Redevelopment Agency's own files, together with a limited program of oral history before excavation, would have revealed that the site of the Golden Eagle Hotel had been largely destroyed--information which should have been considered in the initial site-selection process. The fact that the hotel site was seriously lacking in integrity also rendered aspects of the original research design irrelevant to the subsequent investigation of those portions of the block which proved to be well-preserved.

Although the question of urban site integrity is by no means a simple one, especially within redevelopment areas where demolition occurred as many as 20 years ago and where bottle hunting has been widespread and intensive, it is possible to reconstruct many of these impacts to a project area through a variety of historical sources. It should be noted, however, that the fact that intact trash deposits and features were encountered in an area as disturbed as block J/K/6/7 demonstrates the danger of dismissing sites because of apparent disturbance at the hands of demolition, deep basement construction, and bottle hunting. These areas can, and often do, retain a surprisingly substantial, undisturbed archaeological record.

Another aspect of the problem of historical research may be seen in the relationship between archaeological field work at the Golden Eagle site and the completion of the historical report on the site. Although the initial study of the block (McGowan et al. 1978) reconstructed lot ownership and use from 1850 to 1920, specific details regarding the construction history of the Golden Eagle Hotel and other structures and out-buildings were not available. Well after the completion of field work, an extensive historical report (Pitti 1980) became available; this work, however, focused on the Golden Eagle Hotel. Divorcing the conduct of historical research from archaeological investigations on historical sites rarely produces the kind of integration of the two sources necessary for successful synthetic interpretation in historical archaeology.

It must also be stressed that in order to accomplish data recovery in the implementation of specific research designs, certain categories of historical data must be available. Depending on the research questions guiding the project, this historical data can be quite extensive, pertaining to a variety of problems, such as the local cost and availability of manufactured goods during the period under study; a demographic, economic, and social profile of site occupants; and a broad range of other contextual data on the historical growth of the city. Although it appears that there has been extensive historical research and analysis on a variety of topics relating to Sacramento which may bear directly on site interpretation, these studies have not been made available to the archaeologist. Such mitigation-level historical research and analysis, in line with the primary questions of the research design, is essential to the successful pursuit of any kind of historical archaeology, but particularly to that done in urban settings. Without such historical data, the evaluation and interpretation of single urban sites within a broader social-science framework is nearly impossible.

These problems relating to historical research may be addressed through the preparation of an historical overview for the City of Sacramento as a whole. The purpose of an overview is to provide a comparative framework within which to evaluate the significance of individual sites, in terms of such criteria as "representativeness" (Hickman 1977) and "information loss" (Brown 1979). In addition to summarizing the settlement, land use, social, and economic history of the city, the overview should discuss the nature and availability of primary historical sources in light of a general research design for the city. The research design should stress those areas of urban study which would most benefit from, if not require, archaeological materials for their investigation. As has been mentioned, several overviews have been prepared for California cities within the last two years. While only one considers the entire city--that done for Centre City Redevelopment Corporation by Wirth Associates (1980)--these documents demonstrate the value of overviews for assessing the significance of individual sites and providing a sound basis for testing recommendations. At the project-area level, overviews may even include mitigation-level historical research (Olmsted et al. 1979).

### Research Design

As one of the essential components of the historical overview, the research design for urban archaeology must consider the city as a whole,

providing the means by which investigations of individual sites can be related to broader research questions. Recent research designs for California cities, including that prepared for the Golden Eagle, have stressed the problem of class and ethnic differences as they might be reflected archaeologically. These questions, in turn, have been related to processes such as assimilation and the rise of the urban proletariat (e.g., Pritchett in Olmsted et al. 1979:288-293). Other work has emphasized the testing of geographic models of urban development against specific California examples (e.g., Wirth Associates 1980). Whatever the particular approach taken, it is clear that research designs for urban historical archaeology must incorporate the work of geographers, sociologists, urban anthropologists, and social and economic historians (Salwen 1978:459). If the research design is to provide a broad theoretical framework which justifies future work, it must also postulate models which can explain the patterns observed in both the documentary and archaeological records. The kinds of archaeological data required for addressing various questions, as well as the historical data necessary for their investigation, must be specified. In considering these data categories, a broad range of archaeological evidence should be considered, including large-scale features, such as fill deposits, which are a valuable source of information for studying the process by which cities are created. Although few such research designs exist as guides, in view of the amount of historical research accomplished in Sacramento, as well as the City's long-established tradition of archaeology, it should be possible in the very near future to develop a research design incorporating the interests of historians, archaeologists, and other scholars. Once such a research design has been prepared, it will be possible to undertake archaeology of the City of Sacramento, rather than archaeology in the city.

### Sampling and Field Techniques

With the completion of a research design and historical overview for the city as a whole, it should be possible to construct a sampling strategy which considers both the remaining redevelopment area and other relevant portions of Sacramento. The sampling strategy should specify the types of sites and related features which must be investigated in order to address specific research questions, as well as the field techniques appropriate for the preliminary examination of individual sites and more extensive data recovery. As the Golden Eagle project has demonstrated, these techniques must be appropriate to the scale of the sites involved, as well as sensitive to the complex stratigraphic context of most Sacramento sites. Field techniques pose a major problem for California urban historical archaeology, especially for that which occurs within the regulatory context. There simply are not enough archaeologists available who are sufficiently skilled in interpretation of complex stratigraphy to keep up with the present demand, and it is questionable whether contract archaeology should be a learning context at both the expense of the resource and the taxpayer.

## THE GOLDEN EAGLE SITE

In the sections which follow, many of the problems raised here are discussed in greater detail. The technique employed for the interpretation of stratigraphic relationships on the Golden Eagle site should prove helpful on other urban sites. A general model of urban formation process is outlined, as is the framework of a research design which emphasizes the archaeological study of urban spatial segregation according to class and ethnic differences. It is hoped that both approaches can receive refinement and perhaps broader application. Above all, this report attempts to demonstrate that it is possible, in the context of a site-specific project, to consider research questions and preservation goals which are explicitly directed towards the archaeology of the city.

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