

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS IN THE  
SOLDIERS' BARRACKS COMPLEX OF MISSION  
SAN ANTONIO DE PADUA 1978-1981

Jack S. Williams

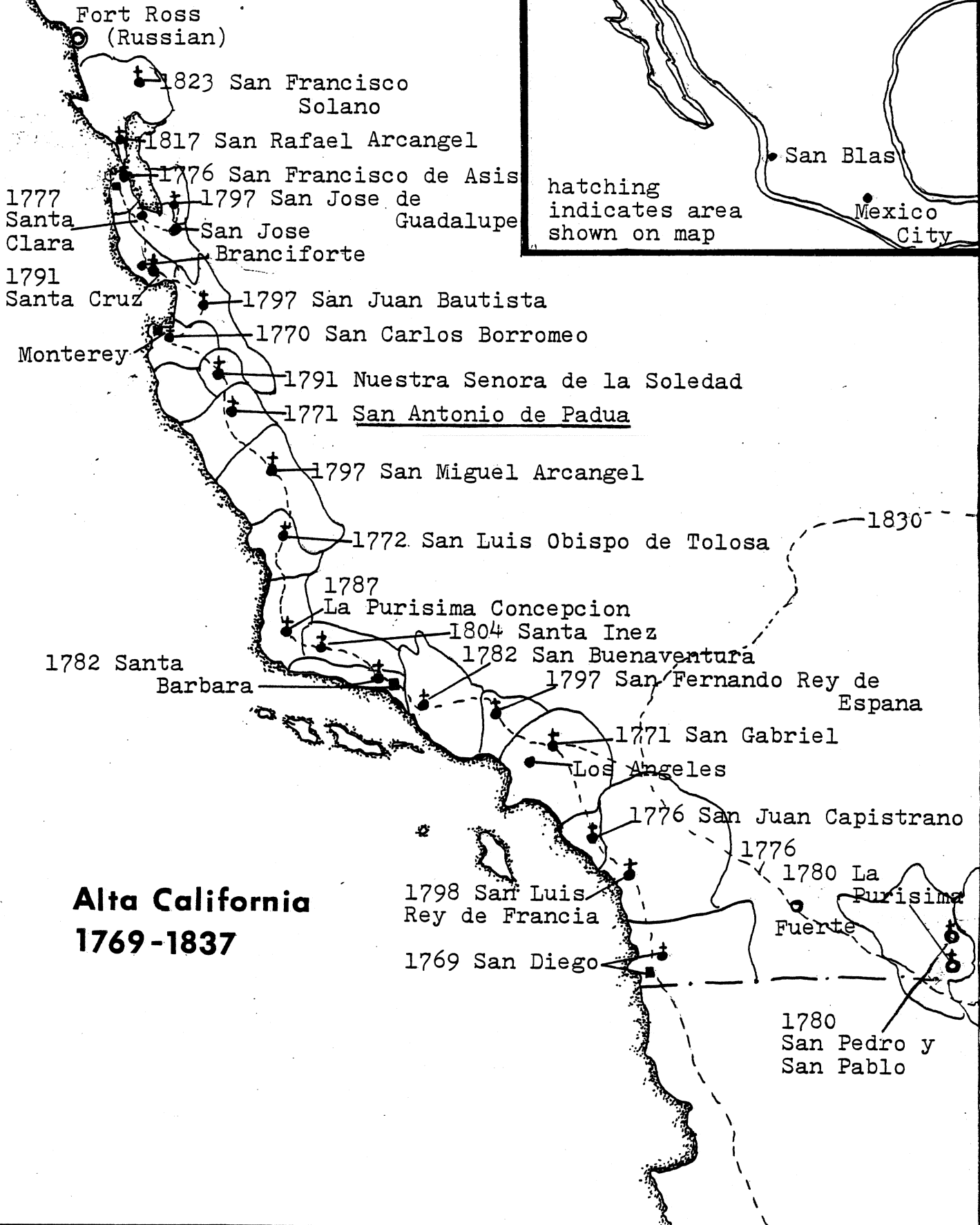
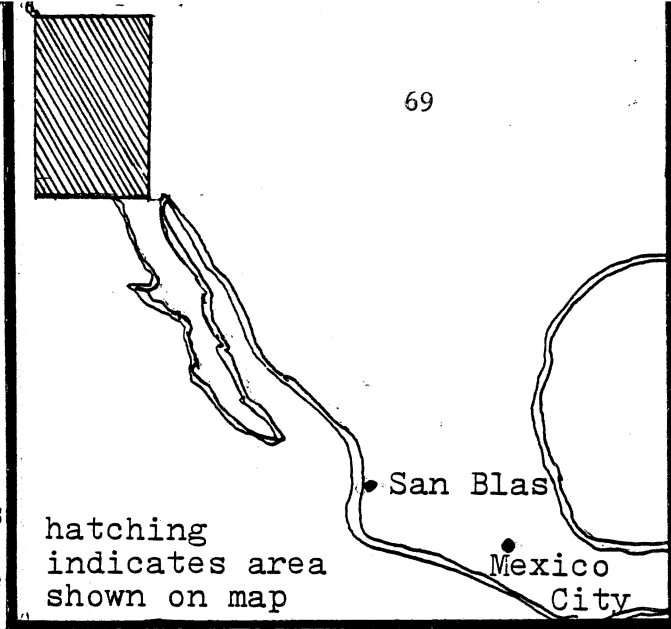
This report concerns the continuing program of archaeological research being conducted at Mission San Antonio near Jolon, California. Mission San Antonio was established in 1771 as a part of the Spanish attempt to secure the region from foreigners, particularly the Russians who were expanding southward along the Pacific Coast at that time. Between 1771 and 1820 the mission was guarded by a regular force of less than five men sent from the Presidio of Monterey.

Beginning in 1976 Dr. Robert Hoover of Cal Poly San Luis Obispo has conducted investigations in the San Antonio complex. Since 1978, the project has concentrated on the excavation of the soldiers' barracks area. Current research has led to a number of important discoveries relating to the historic archaeology of Alta California in the Hispanic period. Some of these have implications for other areas of the northern frontier of New Spain.

The study of Spanish missions continues to be a major focus of archaeological and historical studies of the colonial period in the greater Southwest. This is because of their importance to the overall Spanish imperial program. Far from being purely religious in intent, the missions were designed to meet a number of specific political goals. Their primary military purpose was the securing of new regions through acculturation and assimilation of Native American groups. Spain lacked both the manpower and economy to support colonies in the manner that the English used in what would one day become the eastern seaboard of the United States. The Spanish missionary program had been established during the war of the Gran Chichimeca during the later 16th century. At the end of the eighteenth century Spain experimented with a number of alternative policies. The major institution employed in California up through the dawn of the Mexican era, however, was the mission.

San Antonio mission (Mnt 100) is a particularly significant archaeological site for a number of reasons. One is its early date. Founded in 1771 it was the third mission to be established in Alta California (the first two were San Diego in 1769 and Monterey in 1770). It was moved to its present locale in 1772. Another factor that contributes to the significance of Mission San Antonio is its state of preservation. Returned to the Catholic Church in 1864, it has been maintained by the Franciscan order since that date. The mission is entirely surrounded by Fort Hunter Liggett. This had led to its survival in an almost pristine state. The only major modification of the site occurred during the extensive restoration of the padres' quadrangle since World War II.

The site is a complex archaeological zone covering several acres. It includes numerous ruins of adobe structures and features. The nearby Santa Lucia Mountains produce a rain shadow effect. The result is an aridity that has preserved floral remains to an unusual extent for a



colonial Californian site. Excavations were initiated at the request of the Franciscans in 1976. Without their aid and permission archaeological research would not be possible at the site. The state of preservation and position of Mission San Antonio compares favorably to nearly all the California missions, but particularly the missions founded before 1800.

The most important of the discoveries made in the soldiers' barracks complex are directly related to the internal evolution and economic development of the site. To date the project is one of the few excavations to have encountered clear remains of occupation dating to the period between 1772 and 1800. Evidence of this early phase of occupation contrasts sharply with the artifactual assemblage of the period between 1800 and 1834. The earlier period seems to be similar to those of the Interior Provinces. The almost entirely invisible character of the lower component also suggests that large areas of undisclosed ruins may be present at many of Alta California's missions.

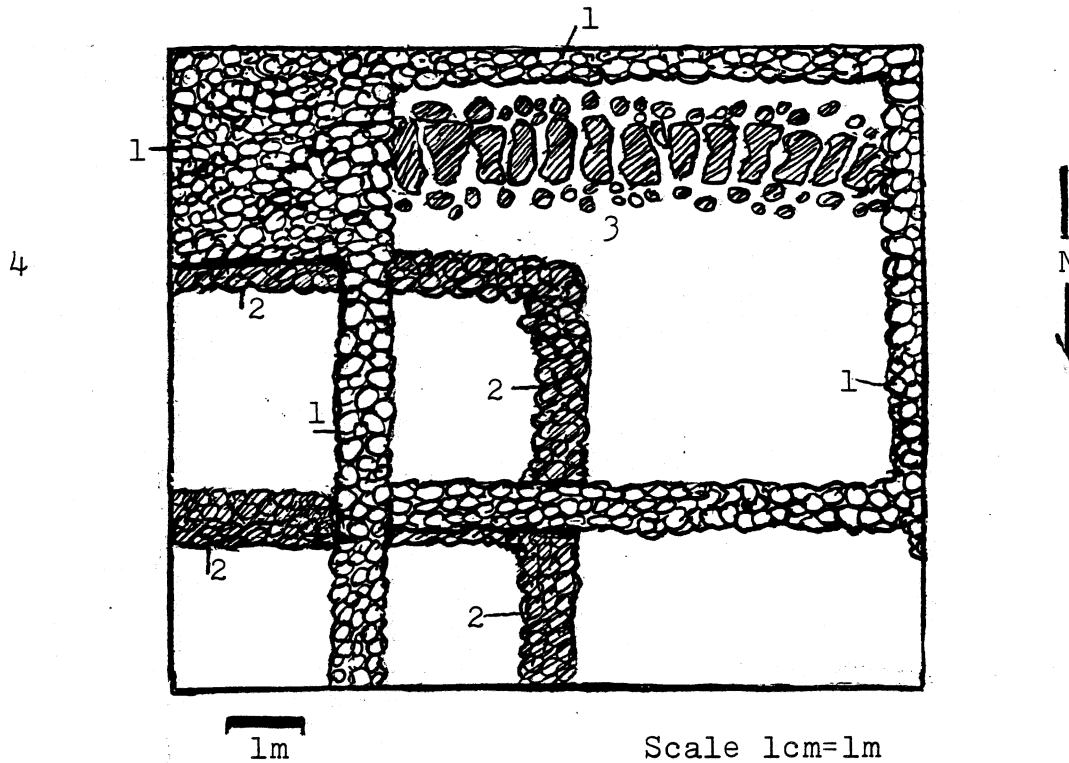
Ethnohistorical studies have produced a large body of data that works along with the archaeological information to reveal many important features of life in the colonial era. The soldiers stationed at San Antonio were part of the frontier corps known as the "soldados de cueras" or leather jacket soldiers. This was because of the distinctive leather armor they wore into battle. This armor consisted of a doublet jacket and a leather shield. Sometimes their horses also wore leather armor. The feet and shins of these soldiers were protected by armas; draped leather that served much like a boot. They were rarely equipped with regular uniforms.

The weapons carried by these soldiers included carbines (escopetas) and pistols, although these seem not to have been preferred. Instead, their mainstays were the lance and the sword, weapons that were reliable and required less sophisticated maintenance. All equipment was provided by the soldiers at their own expense, a factor that may have also encouraged the dependence on swords and lances.

For the most part the soldiers were illiterates, as were most of the frontiersmen of other countries. Nevertheless, they were known to have an excellent grasp of less esoteric skills, including a reputation for horsemanship that was second to none. Their practical knowledge of ranching helped establish the rancho communities that superseded the missions in later Mexican California.

The soldiers lived in isolation from the rest of New Spain. Typically, garrisons were small, rarely numbering more than a couple dozen men. Because of the great distances between communities they were fairly much dependent on the missionaries for subsistence. For amusement they gambled and danced, as well as occasionally going off on a hunting foray with their lances. From time to time, a punitive military expedition would have called them away from their homes. For the most part they continued on at the mission, enjoying the prosperity of the community as a whole.

FOUNDATIONS AND FEATURES EXPOSED 1978-1981  
 Mnt 100 Soldiers'  
 Barracks

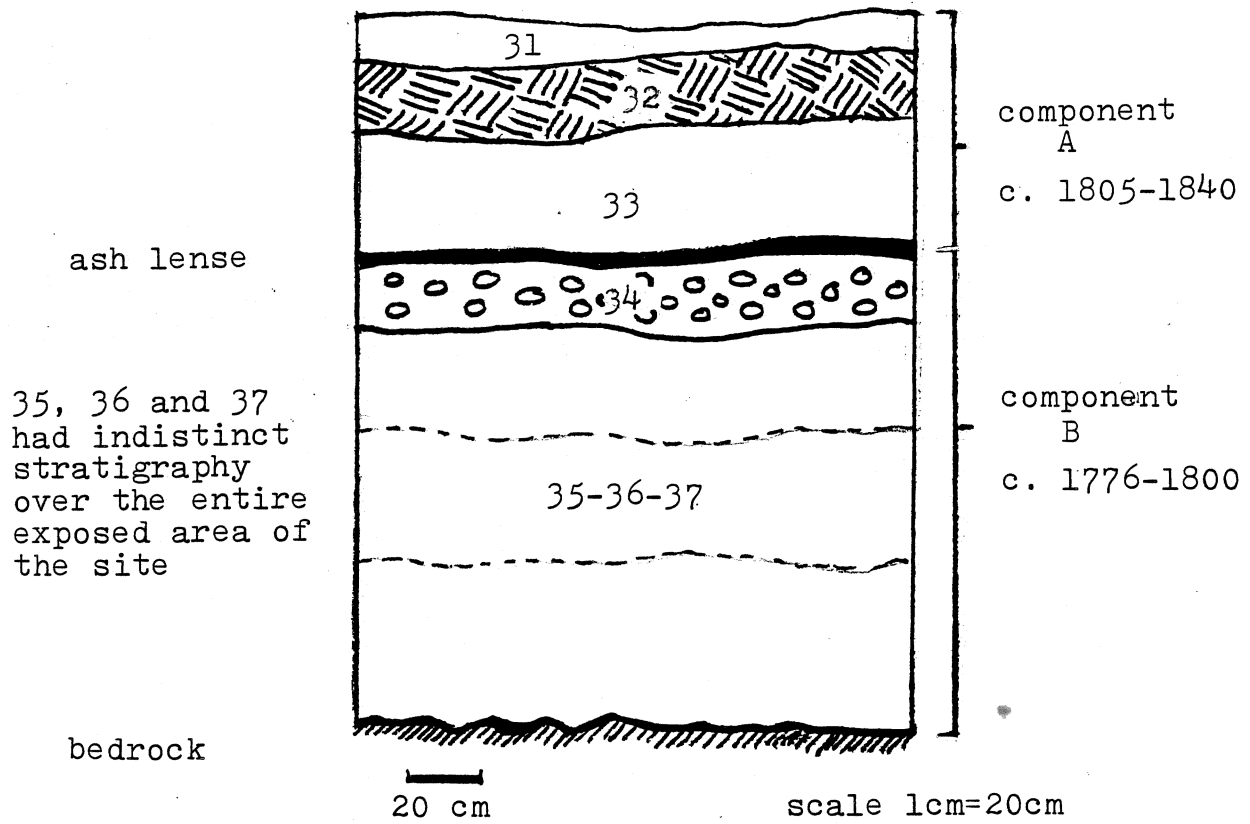


## KEY

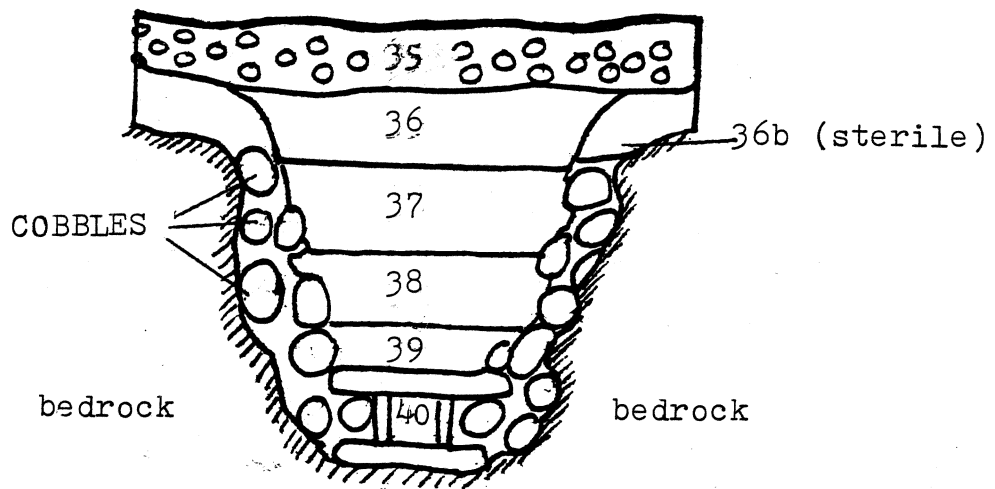
- 1 foundation of the 1805 soldiers' barracks
- 2 foundation of the 1776 soldiers' barracks
- 3 acequia (aqueduct) associated with the 1776 structure
- 4 area covered by present museum

Note: grid and unit designations have been removed to simplify the drawing.

GENERALIZED SITE STRATIGRAPHY OF THE SOLDIERS' BARRACKS AREA OF Mnt 100 - MISSION SAN ANTONIO DE PADUA - 1978-1981



35, 36 and 37 had indistinct stratigraphy over the entire exposed area of the site



CROSS SECTION OF THE ACEQUIA

The earliest soldiers' barracks were built as a part of the fortified log structure that served as the first mission. In 1772 the mission was moved to its present location due to a shortage of water during the dry months at the original site. During the course of our investigations we encountered a deep layer of foundations running on different axes from those exposed on the surface. We have concluded that they probably represent the remains of the soldiers' barracks that were constructed around 1776 (Englehardt 1929:19). These were demolished to make way for the upper structure ca. 1800. Ceramic evidence confirmed an earlier date for the occupation. Structural evidence from the wall foundations also suggested an earlier, less elaborate building style.

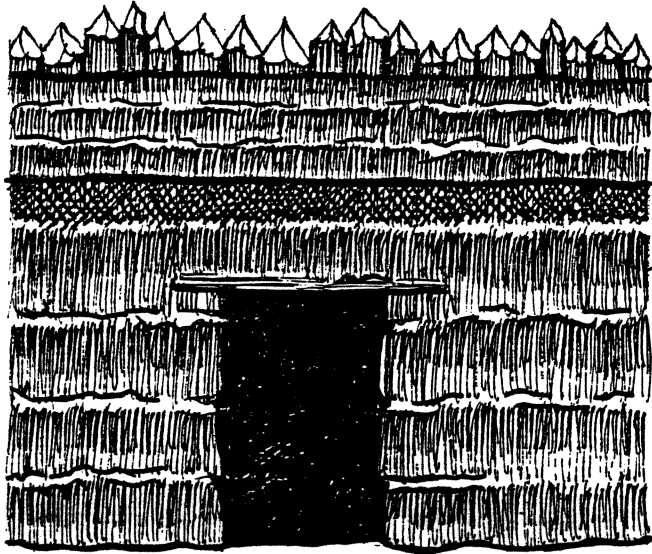
Current excavations in the barracks complex have been in areas thought to represent domestic and weapons storage. Less than ten percent of the 1800's structure has been exposed since 1978.

Both ethnohistoric and archaeological data suggest that the mission passed through several distinct periods. As has already been noted, the earliest buildings, for which we have found no evidence, were constructed out of logs and thatch. By the mid 1770's crude adobe structures were being built. These constructions, built before the extensive use of tile, had earthen roofs. After 1800 such buildings were gradually replaced with elaborate, ornate constructions often having carved doors, tiled roofs and tiled floors.

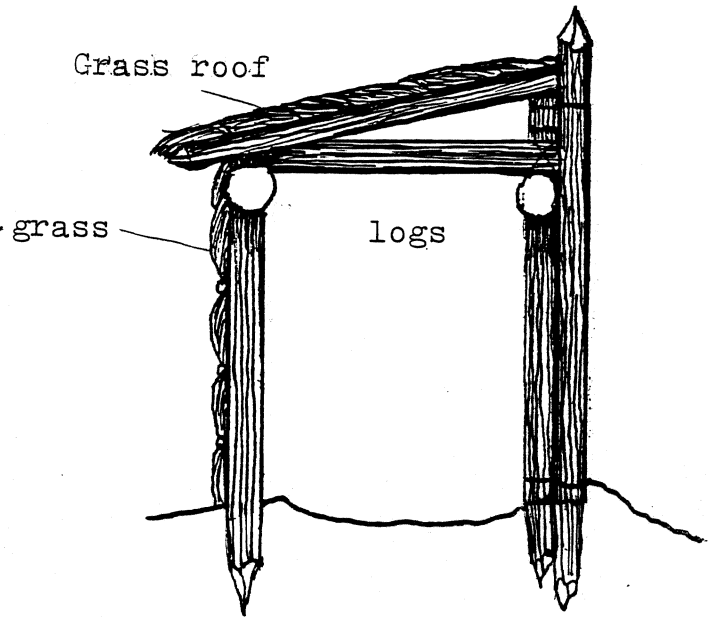
The lower component at San Antonio probably represents the period between the mid 1770's and the turn of the nineteenth century. The ceramic evidence from the lower levels shows a preponderance of majolica and Mexican lead-glazed wares. Even at the earliest levels, however, Chinese porcelain is present. In addition several fragments of a Jalisco burnished ware that is still produced in Tonalá, Mexico, were found. A few gunflints were the only evidence of military occupation. The better examples of these seem to be of the English, or Brandon cut, types. In general the amount of debris located in the lower component was sparse when compared to that of the upper component. The foundations of the earlier level, in contrast with the later, were only one course and had been very carefully laid. They had been placed directly on a sedimentary bed of loosely conglomerated bedrock.

The indications of this earlier period sharply contrast with much of the popular picture of life in Alta California during the period before 1800. The rich architectural tradition, along with many other indicators of affluence are lacking in the earlier time. These remains are quite similar to those described by Fontana as typical of frontier settlements elsewhere in North America (Cheek 1974:220).

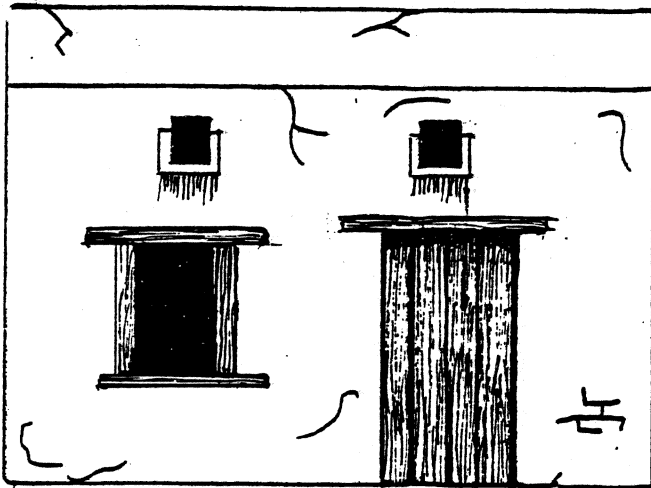
A high concentration of artifacts associated with the end of the earlier occupation were found in an unexpected feature. This was an acequia (aqueduct) that was made of carefully laid slabs of shale and ladrillos. A deep trench had been cut for this acequia into the bedrock. After sealing the acequia with what appears to be a mixture of asphaltum and mud, the construction crews back filled the trench with household debris. An interesting stamped copper or bronze cross,



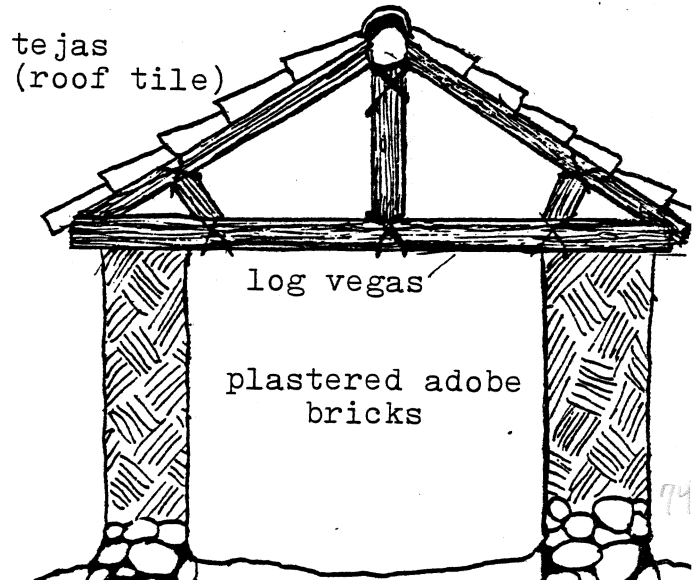
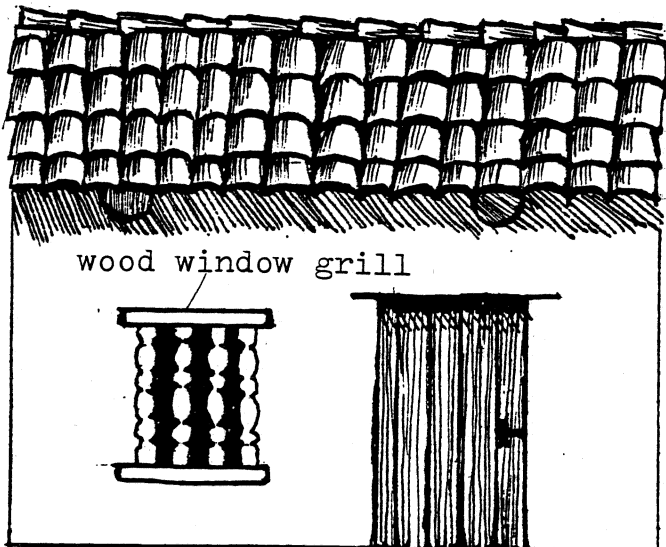
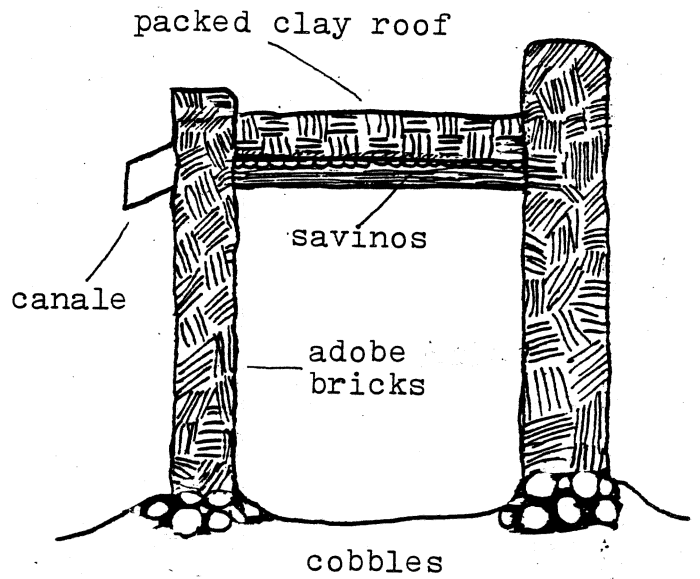
Initial period c. 1770-1775



Developmental period c. 1775-1800



Proto-urban period c. 1800-1834



TOP VIEW OF THE EXPOSED ACEQUIA (AQUADUCT) OF THE SOLDIERS' BARRACKS DISCOVERED IN 1981

quarried shale slab used in capping the acequia (others removed to show interior of feature)

bedrock and riverine cobbles

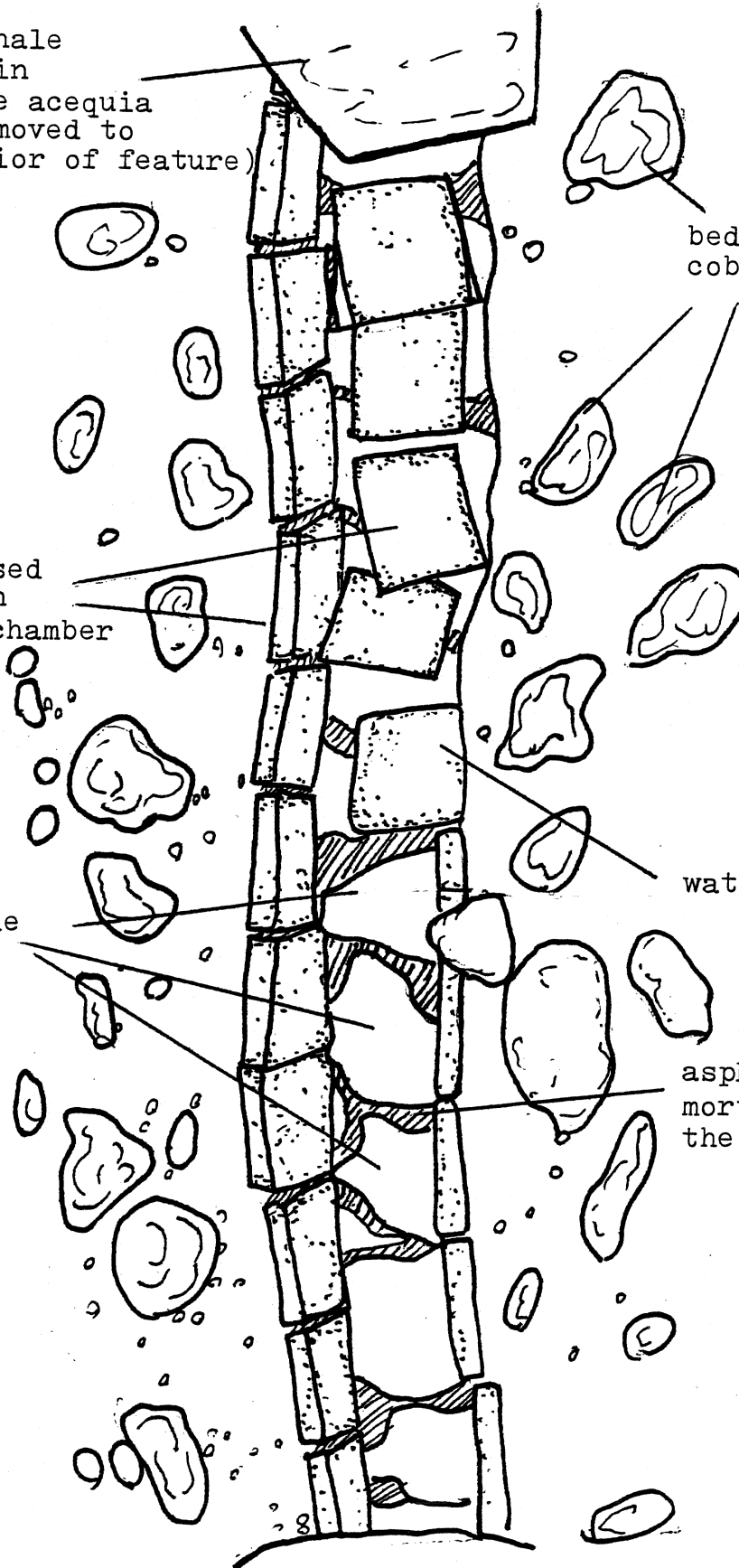
ladrillos (bricks) used as sides in the water chamber

water chamber (channel)

bottom shale slabs

asphaltum and mud mortar used to seal the water channel

scale:  
1cm = 10 cm





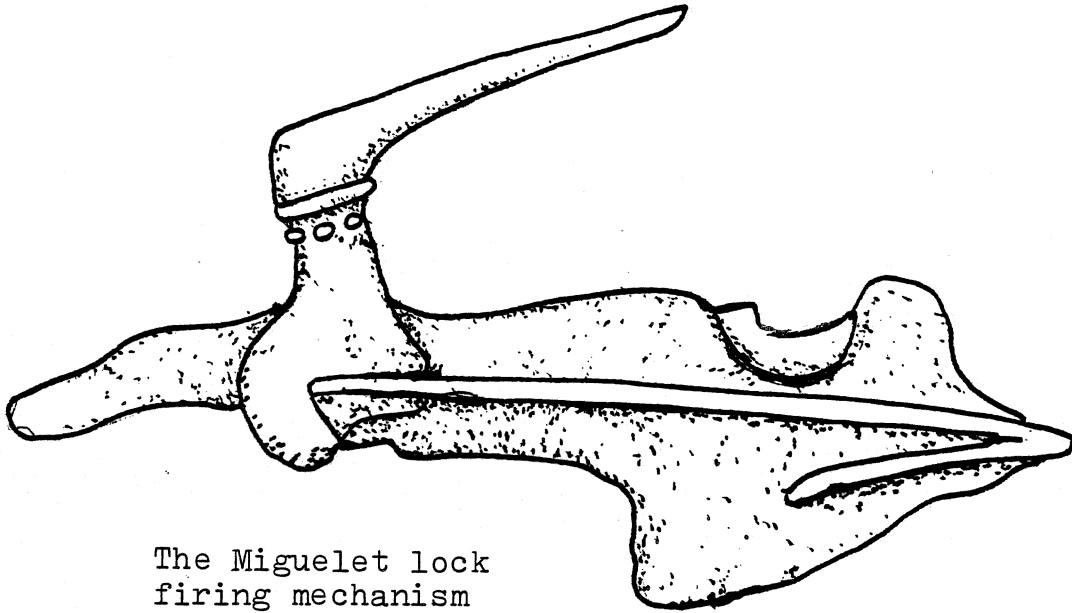
similar to those reported from sites ranging from Alta California to Texas, was discovered along with a vast quantity of ceramic sherds, carbonized wood and lithic debitage. It would appear that the acequia had been laid after 1780, since it included ladrillos. This was somewhat perplexing since we knew that a larger aqueduct had been built in the early 1800's that ran parallel to the one we were excavating. The answer came after the exposure of the interior of the aqueduct, which it turns out had collapsed and filled with silt. Many artifacts were also found in the soil inside the aqueduct. These included an assortment of pottery dating to the later eighteenth century, along with flakes, and what appears to be a sword quillon.

The existence of the acequia points to the importance of water control systems to even the smallest settlements of the frontier. In the case of the soldier's barracks, the nearby supply of water by a perennial stream suggests that the aqueduct served more as a luxury than an essential feature. This feature may indicate the importance of water control to the Spaniards notion of urban living.

An artifact previously collected during the restoration may in fact date to the later eighteenth century military defenses of the site. This is a carved shale gunport similar to those known to have been used in Texas. Perhaps the building was defended by such gunports. We know that the soldiers' barracks of Mission San Luis Rey included a bastion. Possibly a similar structure was present at San Antonio during the earlier period of occupation. Hopefully, further investigations will expose foundations for such features if they still exist.

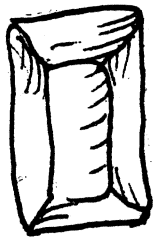
The upper component of the soldiers' barracks probably dates to the period between 1805 and 1834. It had a very different assemblage of artifacts. A preliminary analysis indicated that this component contains ceramics that include a much higher density of Anglo-American wares, particularly pearl-creamwares and transferwares. Chinese procelain occurred in about the same concentration as in earlier levels. The use of majolica and lead-glazed wares decline. This is probably a significant indicator of the supply pattern that developed following the destruction of the Yuma Missions in 1781. During that era the economic dominance of the Anglo-American hide trade between California and the Orient emerged.

Another distinctive difference of the upper component was the relatively dense concentration of weaponry. This included a whole miguelet lock mechanism, more than a dozen musket balls, and a large number of gunflints. French, or continental cut flints are typical of the most formally developed examples of the upper component. This suggests that the world-wide preference for French (or knobbed heel) style flints had reached such isolated places as Alta California. Native American artifacts in the form of disk beads, and stone tools were also found in abundance. The artifacts show the isolated prosperity of the area before secularization. No clear evidence has been found of a tile floor similar to that of the adjacent padres' quarters, however a sufficient amount of broken ladrillos were present to argue that a floor had been removed after secularization.

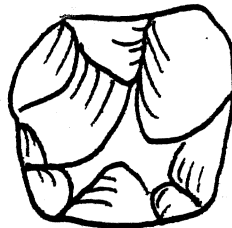


The Miguelet lock  
firing mechanism  
recovered from component A

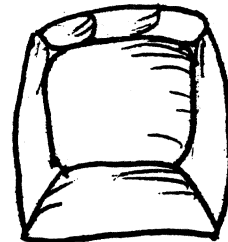
scale: actual



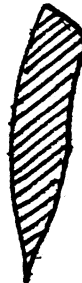
1



2



3



Gunflints (top and cross section)

- 1) English or Brandon Cut
- 2) Gunspall or Indian Cut
- 3) French, Continental or knobbed heel

scale:  
 $1\frac{1}{2}$  times actual

Another important change in the status of the site after 1800 is the development of an overall site plan based on Spanish legal requirements for the foundations of towns and cities. Unlike many of the Missions of Alta California, San Antonio was laid out according to a grand plaza plan instead of a system of interrelated quadrangles and separate gridded neophyte village. In this regard San Antonio closely resembles the distant Jesuit missions of Paraguay. After 1800 we can speak of a proto-urban phase at the mission, when highly acculturated Indians lived out their lives in what amounted to an essentially Euro-American setting. The Spanish program of acculturation had achieved a remarkable degree of success.

We have records indicating that in 1834 the soldiers' barracks were effectively walled off from the rest of the settlement. Perhaps this was the consequence of increased fear of raiding activity by central Californian Indians. Up through that time there is no evidence of a defensive nature for the post-1800 structure.

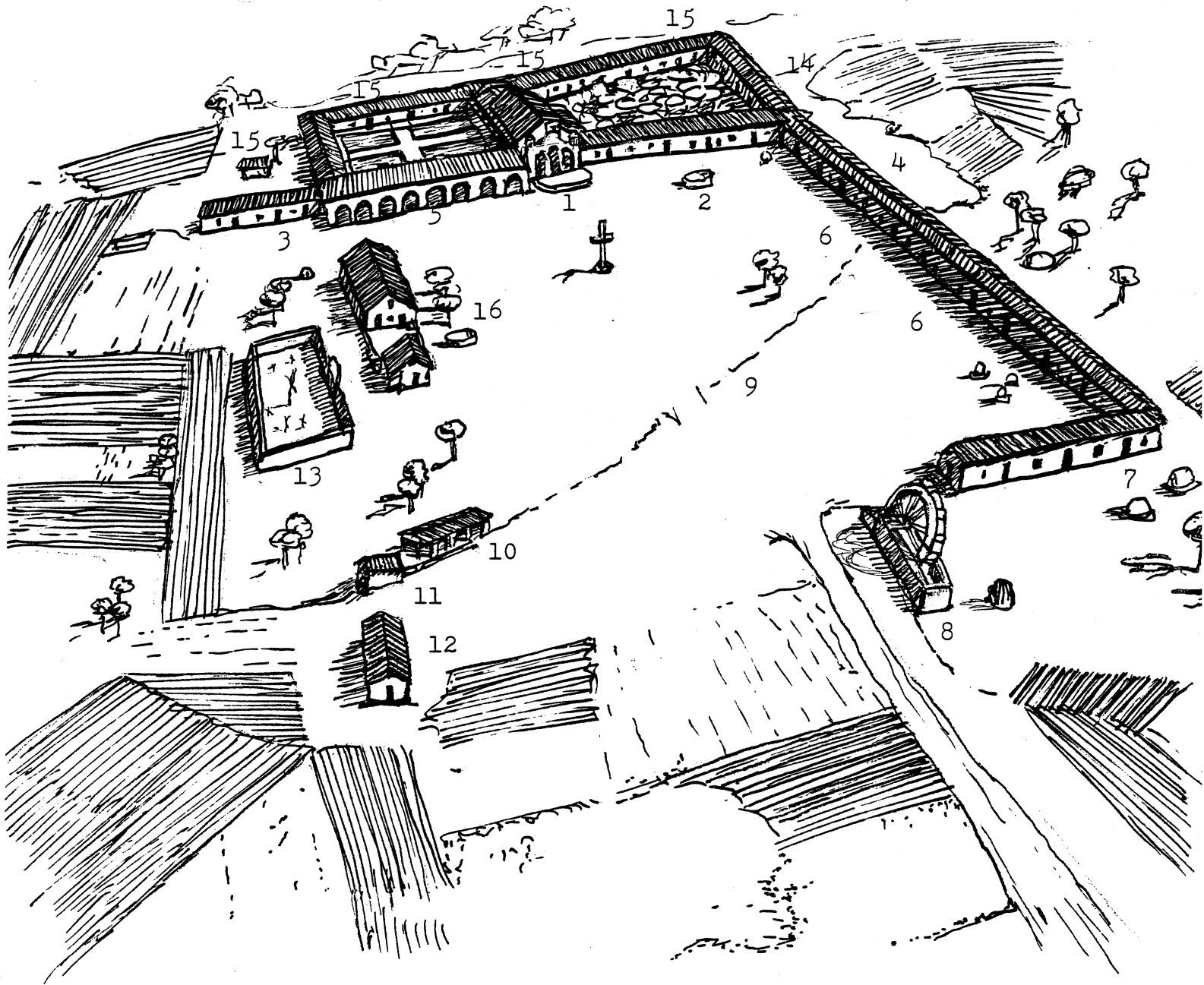
We also lack an adequate understanding of the changing status of the San Antonio garrison after 1821 when Alta California became a part of the Mexican Empire. Ethnohistoric documents suggest that the military strength of the province changed from the governmentally controlled presidios to the private latifundias of the great California Ranchos. Sites like Sutter's Fort on the American River, and General Vallejo's Pentuluma Adobe point to the near feudal social order that came to dominate Alta California in the Mexican period. During this same era San Antonio suffered from gross mismanagement by newly appointed secular authorities. It seems unlikely that the San Antonio garrison would have continued on the same footing it had previously enjoyed. We nevertheless have no archaeological indications of a fundamental shift during the later history of the site. Trends established in the time after 1800 seem to continue as usual.

The soldiers' barracks data has suggested a number of important features of the colonial period that have implications for archaeological studies. First, large complexes of buried structures dating to the earliest periods of occupation in California, exist at many of the missions. This earlier epoch, dating to the era before 1800, can be identified by a distinctive ceramic assemblage that is dominated by majolica and lead-glazed wares, along with other central Mexican wares such as Tonalá polychrome. Untiled, flat roofed buildings with relatively shallow foundations are typical of this era. After 1800 Anglo-American wares are more significant. Large, ornate structures with extensive foundations and tiled roofs and floors characterize this later phase. Chinese porcelain is not diagnostic of either period. The first phase also saw a heavier reliance on Indian material culture. The later era witnessed the widespread employment of European-based technologies.

The soldiers' of San Antonio Mission lived a relatively peaceful, prosperous life. A single raid by hostile Indians was undertaken in the later eighteenth century. Although the raiders escaped, they left behind one wounded neophyte. Elsewhere in the province occurrences took a more violent turn. In the 1770's a major rebellion took place that

occurrences

THE MISSION SAN ANTONIO DE PADUA COMPLEX IN 1820

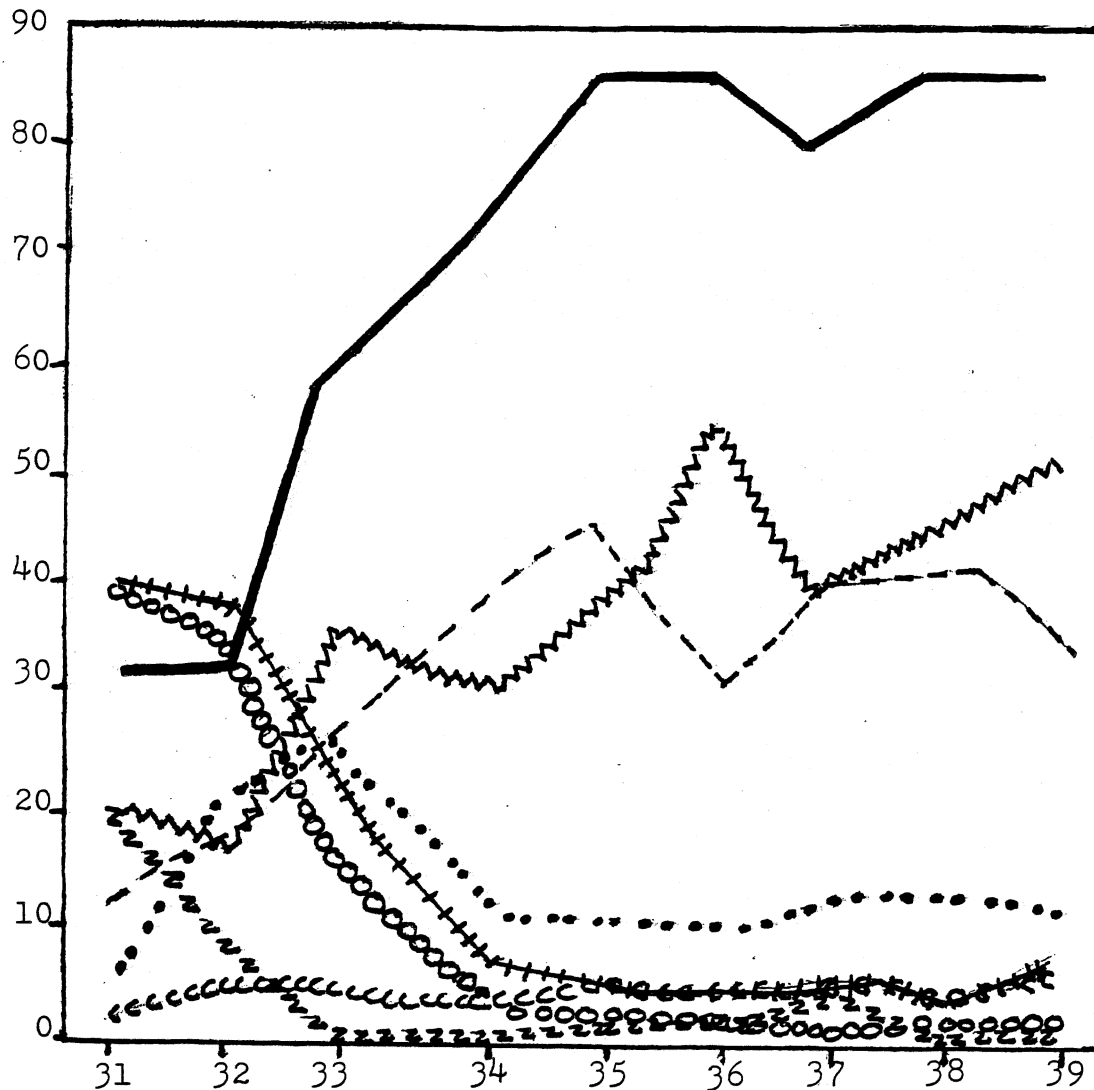


key

- 1 Church finished 1813
- 2 well
- 3 soldiers' barracks
- 4 resevoir
- 5 padres' quarters
- 6 neophyte homes
- 7 communal kitchen
- 8 noria well

- 9 acequia (aquaduct)
- 10 tannery
- 11 mill
- 12 warehouse
- 13 cemetery
- 14 monajero
- 15 shops and warehouses
- 16 house of the majordomo

COMPARATIVE PERCENT OF CERAMICS PRESENT IN THE SOLDIERS' BARRACKS COMPLEX OF MISSION SAN ANTONIO DE PADUA 1978-1981.



key

- total imported hispanic ceramics
- oooooo total anglo-american ceramics
- cccccc total chinese ceramics
- ++++ total imported non-hispanic ceramics
- ..... local plainware (missionware)
- ~~~~~ majolica
- other hispanic
- zzzzz other

destroyed San Diego Mission, and for awhile it put an end to the missionary program in the south. In the 1780's the Yuma missions were permanently destroyed in a violent conflict that left California cut off from Sonora. In the second decade of the nineteenth century, a French revolutionary-pirate sacked the capital at Monterey as well as a fair number of coastal missions. In the 1820's a series of violent rebellions occurred among the Chumash further south. The small garrison of San Antonio must have stood in preparation, in view of the conflicts that were occurring around them. Nevertheless, the Spanish program at San Antonio seemed to work out over time. Many of the garrison took Indian wives. By the end of the colonial period their archaeological remains exhibit a high degree of mixture of California Indian, Mexican, and Spanish cultural traits. This characteristic mixture of culture parallels the progression of Spanish civilization throughout the New World.

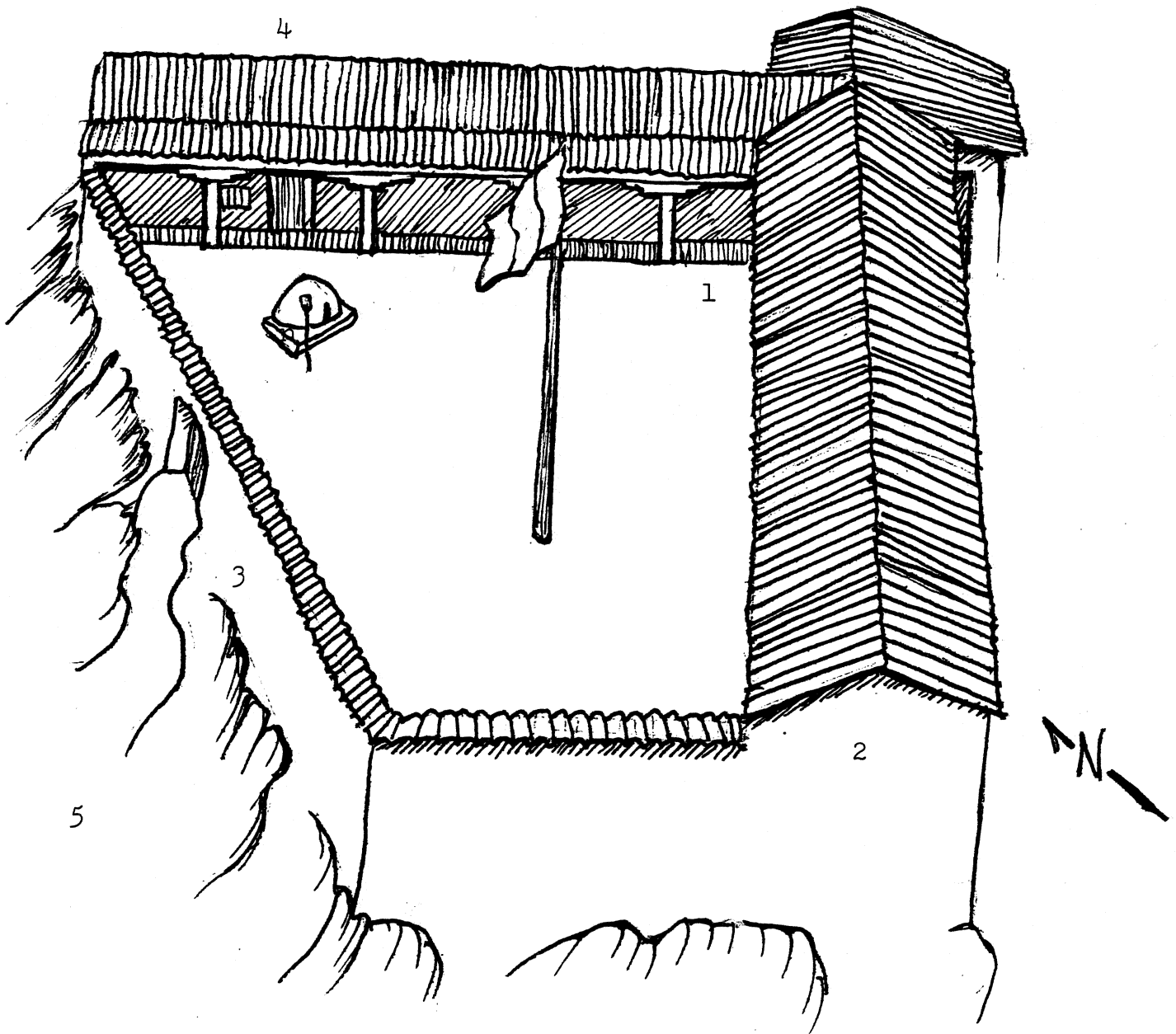
To some extent this process of acculturation has parallels in the Anglo frontier. This is particularly true in the era of the fur trappers, when a similar exposure to isolated conditions led to the adoption of many Indian traits by people of European descent. Such behavior points to the characteristic two-way exchange of the initial periods of interaction. As the Indians were acculturating to a European way of life, the Euro-American settlers were similarly adopting Indian traits.

Another important point raised by both the excavation of the soldiers' barracks and the neophytes' quarters is the non-coercive role of the soldiery. There were simply too few men stationed at the mission (usually five), to keep the Indians under overt control (the maximum Indian population at the mission was in excess of 1800). Furthermore, the neophyte quarters show no internal structural features that suggest the Indians were held against their will. The overall layout of the settlement is typical of Spanish towns, rather than prisons. The continued importance of hunted and gathered resources along with other native traits suggest that forced culture change was not a feature of life at Mission San Antonio. The soldiers functioned first and foremost as enforcers of the king's law, protectors of the Indians, and as ad hoc instructors in European technology.

The period between 1770 and 1800 in Alta California shows sharp parallels with the rest of the Interior Provinces. The relatively light density of European artifacts and scarcity of discarded military goods seems similar to the situations encountered in the Santa Cruz Valley of Pimeria Alta, on the Rio Grande in New Mexico, and in the wilds of Texas.

After 1800, isolation combined with the accessibility of marine trade to transform the Province. The strategic position of Alta California in regards to a developing intercontinental trade with the Orient helped to cause a shift in the economic infrastructure of the region. Unhindered by menaces such as the Apaches or Comanches, the growing livestock business made an export/import economy possible. While the rest of the Interior Provinces struggled to survive, Alta California prospered.

Future archaeological excavations at San Antonio will focus on uncovering a more extensive area of the soldiers' barracks complex.



Key

- 1) Current area of investigation
- 2) Soldiers' homes (post 1805)
- 3) Wall connecting the barracks with the western wing of the main quadrangle. (built during 1834)
- 4) Western wing of the main quadrangle. The building furthest north was a granary.
- 5) Banks of Mission Creek

Further evidence related to the social and economic nature of Alta California in the Spanish period will be sought. In addition to this a considerable effort will be made to compare the lifestyles of soldiers' and contemporary Indians living at the mission to clarify the processes of acculturation that took place there.

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