

An archaeological management strategy for El Presidio de San Francisco

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Introduction

Levantar, an archaeological management strategy, outlines the mission, goals and current programs for archaeology at the Presidio of San Francisco, Alta California. This report was completed in draft form in 2003 and is currently being revised for public release after consideration of public and peer review comments.

El Presidio de San Francisco was the third of four Spanish colonial presidios in what is today the state of California. The others, in order of establishment, are San Diego, Monterey, and Santa Barbara. The government of New Spain, partly in reaction to the potential for Russian economic expansion into North America, built these four coastal presidios. In addition to the presidios, 21 Franciscan missions were founded in Alta California between the years 1769 and 1823. Some 65 mi. north of San Francisco was the Ross Colony, the Russian-American Company's southernmost mercantile settlement, which operated between the years 1812 and 1841.

Our purpose is to further the understanding and preservation of significant aspects of our nation's heritage as embodied in the archaeological resources of the Presidio of San Francisco for the benefit of current and future generations. *Levantar* reviews the status of and makes recommendations about the future of the Presidio Archaeology Lab, its programs and its partnerships.

For context, El Presidio is a "presidio within a presidio." It is a site of approximately 6 acres containing the archaeological and architectural features of the colonial-period settlement that we refer to by its Spanish name of El Presidio de San Francisco and which lies within the 1,500-acre former U.S. Army post known as the Presidio of San Francisco. The larger property was an active military post of the United States Army from 1848 to 1994. Today, the Presidio of San Francisco is in its entirety a National Historic Landmark District, the highest designation given to an historic property in the United States. A remarkable collection of architecture and archaeology serves as a daily reminder of the place's historical legacy and the flags of three nations which flew over the Presidio: Spain (1776-1821), Mexico (1821-1848), and the U.S. 1848-1994.

Our primary program areas include the historical record, much of which is in Spanish; fieldwork and site preservation; collections and conservation; and education and outreach. Within these I will describe the following areas of ongoing activity:

- Design status for a new Presidio Archaeology Center
- Condition assessment and conservation of the Officers' Club adobe walls
- GIS mapping project
- Landscape treatment and interpretation of the El Presidio quadrangle

The Presidio Archaeology Center

The Presidio Archaeology Lab is operated by the Presidio Trust in cooperation with numerous partner organizations, including the National Park Service. We are currently located in a single-story wood-frame building with wood siding and a concrete pier foundation. This 10,000-ft² “temporary” building was constructed in 1917 as a warehouse and was part of the presidio’s supply depot for the First World War.

While the existing Archaeology Lab affords us considerable floor space and great views of San Francisco Bay, there are many challenges associated with occupying a building that was constructed for temporary use nearly 90 years ago and which has received minimal maintenance since that time.

With its leaking roof, peeling paint, outdated plumbing, lack of climate control, and wooden construction, the Archaeology Lab fails to meet numerous U.S. federal standards for housing archaeological collections. The building, although historic, is also slated for future demolition or relocation to accommodate a highway reconstruction project.

The lab has a permanent professional staff of five employees: four archaeologists and a GIS specialist. We have a dedicated cadre of adult volunteers who assist us on Thursday and Friday mornings, some of whom have been helping out for over four years. Currently we have two university interns, who work part-time. Liz Lee, a senior from the University of California, Berkeley, is working on a GIS project for her senior thesis, and Jenn McCann, a graduate student from San Francisco State University, is rehousing some of our archaeological collections.

Our work would not get done without our many academic and nonprofit partners, only some of whom are mentioned here. During the summer, we often sponsor archaeological field schools which in the past have included Cabrillo College, U.C. Berkeley and Stanford University. In the summer of 2006, Cabrillo College is returning for additional excavations at the foundations of the Spanish colonial chapel. Our nonprofit partner, ArchaeoCommons, helps us provide scholarships and stipends for student researchers as well as digital technology applications for collections management, documentation of historic features and grant proposal writing.

A study of our program space requirements resulted in development of a space relationship model that was used to define the lab activities, their adjacencies, and suggested more efficient space utilization. As part of *Levantar*, we identified the goal of relocating the Archaeology Lab to the Main Post where it will be at the archaeological site of El Presidio. This new Presidio Archaeology Center will provide expanded research, curation and educational opportunities which will greatly enhance our archaeological program. Initially, our planning director preferred the concept of rehabilitating two World War II buildings within the El Presidio quadrangle, with new construction nearby for housing of collections. This idea has been discarded, however; we are now considering these two buildings for expansion of our educational program. Currently, we are evaluating the potential for relocation of the lab in part of the Presidio Officers’ Club and an adjacent historic building, along with new construction for storage of the archaeological collections.

Condition assessment and conservation of the Presidio Officers’ Club

Few buildings from the Spanish colonial period remain standing in California, and the

majority of these are associated with mission complexes. The Presidio of San Francisco's Officers' Club is one whose purpose was originally defensive, and it is somewhat unique among the four presidios in California due to the continuity of its military occupation, variety of functions and intermittent additions and adaptations over time.

Recognizing that layers of history lay beneath the façade of the building, archaeologists at the lab began an excavation project in the club's Mesa Room, one of the smaller of the main rooms in the building. Eric Blind and Liz Clevenger, working with carpenters Tim Boatwright and Ernesto Meraz, began carefully removing layers of materials, exposing painted stencils under modern drywall and original adobe beneath wood framing. In addition, two hidden doors were exposed, revealing a pass-through that divides the Mesa Room into two chambers.

In order to further the lab's goals to make the presidio a living classroom for lifelong learning, the Presidio Trust invited students and professors from the Multimedia Authoring Center for Teaching in Anthropology [MACTiA] Laboratory from U.C. Berkeley to participate in aspects of the project. This team, led by Dr. Michael Ashley, brought in sophisticated technology and student assistance from their facility in Berkeley, including two laser scan (LIDAR) machines in order to digitally record the surfaces of the structure and provide detailed views of specific structural elements. High-end digital photography was also employed, which may prove useful in dating some of the wood elements.

Professor Paul Goldberg of Boston University visited San Francisco to take micro-morphological samples of specific elements of the building. These included the adobe brick, mortar and plaster interfaces as well as some samples from the historic packed clay floor and sub-floor matrix. Interesting data regarding floral remains may be found in this section as well as a sample from a potential hearth feature beneath one of the adobe partition walls. Erica Simmons of Stanford University sampled portions of the newly exposed adobe in a comparative study with sections taken from the remains of another adobe excavated by Professor Barbara Voss and students from Stanford University in a valley to the east of the Officers' Club.

A detailed Harris matrix is being developed based on the results of this field work, tying together investigations of the standing architecture as well as archaeological excavations on the interior and exterior of the extant building. This matrix also provides a tool for integrating facts about the building's life history derived from the documentary record with evidence from physical investigation.

Trinidad Rico, a US/ICOMOS visiting scholar from Argentina, began a conservation monitoring effort in the Mesa Room in the summer of 2005, with aid from adobe specialist Tony Crosby. This initiative included photo-documentation of the existing conditions and implementation of environmental and structural monitoring devices. The graphic database she developed to record this information could prove to be a more visually interactive way to access the data and monitor changes to the structure.

Digital mapping and modeling of the presidio

Years of archaeological survey and research at the site of El Presidio resulted in a myriad of individual maps and mapping methodology. Although most of the maps were complete and of good quality, there was no one place from which to retrieve information about the site. This project produced a framework to accommodate a wide range of digital mapping products. Although the focus of the work was on the archaeological site of El Presidio, the products developed can be applied to other sites throughout the larger Presidio National Historic

Landmark District.

The framework makes available mapping data from past archaeological projects and is designed to accommodate future work using specific documentation standards. Interpretive graphics were developed that will be useful to archaeologists and engaging to the public, such as 3D digital models of El Presidio prepared to foster a better understanding of the site and its evolution.

One of our challenges is the widespread existence of underground utilities which are now overlain on the El Presidio map. This helps define areas of past disturbance and shows restrictions on new investigations.

Landscape treatment and interpretation of El Presidio's quadrangle

Sixteen wood-framed two-story clapboard cottages with wood shingle roofs were constructed on Funston Avenue in 1862 to house U.S. Army officers of the 9th Infantry Regiment. Six of these cottages and their rear yards are located within or near the eastern façade of El Presidio de San Francisco which was first discovered archaeologically in 1993. Outside of the Presidio Officers' Club is the southern façade which includes foundations of the Spanish colonial chapel which were first excavated by Cabrillo College between the years 1996 and 1998 and which will have additional excavation in the summer of 2006.

We are currently developing plans for future landscape treatments of the El Presidio quadrangle that will distinguish this resource from surrounding areas of the Main Post. Some of the ideas for the interior of the quadrangle include gradual reduction and/or removal of vehicle parking and changes in pavement coloration to delineate the quadrangle until more comprehensive changes can be made.

The most complete plans thus far are for the landscaping of the El Presidio chapel site after the Cabrillo College field school in July 2006. The selected landscape treatment will include recreation of colonial foundation walls by adding additional courses of stone for interpretive purposes, definition of interior and exterior spaces by using a palette of paving stones or other landscape materials, elimination of irrigation, and reduction in the amount of vegetation. Replacement plants will be drought-tolerant. Additional studies will be ongoing for the landscaping and interpretation of the eastern façade of El Presidio in association with exterior lead remediation in the soil and rehabilitation of the structures for interim occupancy.

Anza Esplanade: Although this planning initiative focuses on the Main Parade Ground, the design alternative and interpretive themes that are selected here are important because of the adjacency to El Presidio. The Main Post, known as the "heart of the presidio," has been the presidio's social and administrative center throughout its history. At the Main Post's core is a 7-acre central parade ground once used for military drills, troop exercises and public ceremonies. The Presidio Trust is now seeking to reestablish the Main Parade Ground, currently a surface parking lot, as a central gathering place for park visitors, residents and employees. Over the last year, five public workshops have resulted into a conceptual vision for the Main Parade which envisions the Main Parade Ground as green open space designed to accommodate an array of new public uses, including performances, special events, and everyday activities, and the Anza Esplanade would serve as a wide pedestrian promenade lined with landscaped terraces that incorporate new venues for historical interpretation, special events, and public art. Planning objectives seek to simplify and clarify the existing roadway system, improve pedestrian access, and reorganize the existing parking spaces to meet future demand.

Summary

We will share news of these exciting projects at our upcoming professional meetings, including the future binational symposiums hosted by INAH, the Society for Historical Archaeology, the California Mission Studies Association, the Society for California Archaeology, and the Society for American Archaeology.

Thank you to INAH for the opportunity to share of information with our colleagues in both Baja and Alta California. I would like to acknowledge the contributions of Liz Clevenger, and Michael Ashley, who are responsible for much of the content of this paper, and in particular to Eric Blind who directed the investigations at the Officers' Club which are described in this paper.