

6. OBSERVATIONS ON HISTORIC SITES AND ARCHAEOLOGY IN CALIFORNIA

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California was admitted to the Union exactly 100 years ago in 1850. Only 81 years before, in 1769, the first of the Spanish missions was founded at San Diego. Beyond this date there was no Caucasian settlement - only brief landings on the coast by sailors like Cabrillo (1542), Cermeno (1595), Sir Francis Drake (1579), and Vizcaino (1602). Thus, we live in a territory discovered just 50 years after Columbus' voyage, but not settled until 277 years after 1492. The Spanish settlements were numerous, but were restricted to the littoral, and not until the second quarter of the nineteenth century were establishments (farms and forts) extended into the Interior Valley. It was the discovery of gold at Coloma in February, 1848, which brought to California its first population in large numbers who settled throughout the state. It is the actual recency of most of California's Caucasian history which makes it seem close at hand and familiar, and its physical remains so available and easily recoverable.

Of the missions, 21 in all extending from San Diego to Sonoma, most are now reconstructed and constitute spots of the greatest historical and tourist interest. Perhaps it does not matter that most of the reconstructions are badly executed and inaccurate - rebuilt in approximate lines of their originals, they stand as symbols of California's Spanish period. Should the demand for historical accuracy, combined with an enlightened public works program supported with sufficient funds ever bring about the proper reconstruction of the Missions, archivists, historians, archaeologists and engineers would be able to produce as accurate and authentic mission reconstructions as one may see at Williamsburg, Virginia.

Among those partial reconstructions, well meant but badly done, may be mentioned Sutters Fort (1839) at Sacramento, and Fort Ross (1812) on the Mendocino County coast. Careful sub-surface archaeology, plus the proper documentary research could furnish detailed plans for the proper rebuilding of these famed and treasured relics of the history of California. To those who read these lines and believe my remarks over-critical, let me say that I have nothing but respect and admiration for the many individuals and organizations which have been instrumental in preserving these historic treasures - my only observation is that if sites are to be reconstructed, let this be done properly.

Of the pre-Mission period of exploration, we possess some material evidence in the form of the several diaries, official accounts and correspondence connected with the voyages, as well as certain material evidences such as Drake's Plate of Brass¹, the Ming porcelain fragments and iron spikes from Cermeno's San Agustin², and a number of inlaid glass beads of the "Star of Chevron" type attributed to Cabrillo's period³.

From the Gold Rush period, only a century old, we have the most complete sort of record, both concrete and documentary. But, as a recent survey⁴ of building structures in the Mother Lode demonstrated, old buildings get in the way and are torn down, are dismantled for their lumber or stone or brick, suffer from decay and fires, and in a thousand other ways lose, as all things must, the battle against time. The destructive processes still continue, and now is the time to rescue for the generation of a hundred years hence some of the more important of these Sierran buildings. Long since

some person familiar with architecture should have drawn careful plans with notes on structural details of these buildings in order that future historians might have these available for the studies and reconstructions which they will inevitably make. The results which can be accomplished in California by a combination of the archivists' and archaeologists' endeavors are illustrated by the investigation of the Sutter sawmill at Coloma,⁵ and the recovery of the site and remains of the Monterey Custom House flag pole.⁶

The Mother Lode, from Mormon Bar in the south to Downieville in the north, contains a number of now almost forgotten spots but which, during the Gold Rush, were boom towns. The State's interest in Columbia is a step in the right direction, and Dr. A. Neasham's capable documentary survey will permit the necessary intelligent and accurate reconstruction of that charming town if the state chooses to rebuild it. There are other places which have their particular flavor of the 1850 decade - Hornitos and Coulterville in the south, Chinese Camp, Calaveritas, Fiddletown, Coloma, Volcano, Mokelumne Hill, and Murphys in the central Mother Lode, and French Corral and Camptonville in the north. It is unreasonable to suppose the state should or could buy these towns or sites outright, but a program of reconstruction and upkeep could be instituted which would preserve for the future the unique flavor of the Gold Rush towns.

I append here a list of possible historical events or sites which may be susceptible to location and archaeological definition, or which, because of neglect or the threat of destruction, demand attention.

1. Sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: The grave of Cabrillo (1543) on San Nicolas Island; the site of Sir Francis Drake's 1579 landfall on the California coast; further investigation in the Drake's Bay sites which have produced evidence of Cermeño's 1595 shipwreck.
2. Eighteenth century: The graves of Perez' crewmen of the San Antonio at Dead Man's Point, Monterey Bay (1769); Fort San Joaquin at the San Francisco Presidio. The Spanish settlement at Bodega Bay (1793)⁷; the exact site of the erection of the Spanish cross at Trinidad Bay (1776)⁸.
3. Nineteenth century: Fort Ross (1812);⁹ Fort Tejon (1854); Camp Cady (1860); Fort Humboldt (1852); Fort Miller (1852); The W. B. Ide adobe (1845); the Russian establishment on the Farallone Islands¹⁰; the Olema lime kilns;¹¹ San Emigdio "Mission" in Kern County (pre-1824)¹²; Capt. Sutter's grist mill on the American River; San Luis Gonzaga (Pacheco Pass), a stopover point for Spanish expeditionary forces going to the lower San Joaquin Valley; the "golden images and candle-sticks" in an Indian village near Porterville seen by Leonard in 1834¹³ and which were spoils of the 1824 revolt in the Santa Barbara channel missions¹⁴; evidence of the Hudson's Bay Company activities at French Camp near Stockton (1832-1845); further excavations in the historic Indian village site in Fremont Bend opposite the mouth of the Feather River where Yellow Serpent's Walla Walla group encamped.¹⁵

A desirable investigation in California history would be a careful cataloguing and documentation of all historic objects and sites of the pre-1848 period.¹⁶ Such a survey would entail a search through the literature to locate published materials¹⁷, and an inspection of the collections in a score of historical, fine arts and anthropological museums both in California and the east.

The data which would be accumulated by such a survey would, I am certain, be most impressive both as regards quantity, variety, and potential usefulness. Historians, archaeologists and all persons otherwise interested in California history would find such a data file of great utility, and we might all be surprised at some of the results which would obtrude from the mere collection of these data. Hitherto unknown or neglected historic sites and events would inevitably be discovered during the progress of such a historical object and site survey. Should any individual or organization feel that a project of this sort was desirable and could offer the necessary financing, the Archaeological Survey would be willing to supervise the work, and to locate some qualified research worker to perform the fieldwork of museum inspection.

Two publications of interest in connection with the value of historic sites are: "Minutes of the Conference on the Use and Resources in Historical Areas Administered by the National Park Service Held in Colonial National Historical Park, May 6 and 7, 1946," mimeographed report, Oct. 1946, Nat. Park Service; "Preserving America's Heritage of Historic Sites and Buildings." Nat. Council for Historic Sites and Buildings, Washington, 1947 (reprinted from Planning and Civic Comment, April-June, 1947.)

NOTES

- 1 Drake's Plate of Brass; Evidence of His Visit to California in 1579. Calif. Hist. Soc., Special Publ. No. 13. San Francisco, 1937. C. G. Fink and E. P. Polushkin. Drake's Plate of Brass Authenticated. Ibid, Spec. Publ. No. 14. San Francisco, 1938.
- 2 R. F. Heizer. Archaeological Evidence of Sebastian Rodriguez Cermeño's California Visit in 1595. California Historical Society, 1942. San Francisco.
- 3 An example is shown in Pl. XIII, figs. 14, 15 of Report Upon United States Geographical Surveys West of the One Hundredth Meridian, Vol. 7, Archaeology. Washington, 1879.
- 4 R. F. Heizer and F. Fenenga. "Survey of Building Structures of the Sierran Gold Belt, 1848-1870." In Geologic Guidebook Along Highway 49 - Sierran Gold Belt State Division of Mines, Bulletin 141, pp. 91-164, 1948.
- 5 California Gold Discovery: Centennial Papers on the Time, the Site and Artifacts. California Historical Society, Spec. Publ. No. 21. San Francisco, 1947.
- 6 A. Neasham. "The Raising of the Flag at Monterey, California, July 7, 1846." California Historical Society Quarterly, Vol. 25, pp. 193-203, 1946. R. K. Beardsley. "The Monterey Custom House Flag Pole: Archaeological Findings." Ibid, pp. 204-218.
- 7 H. R. Wagner. "The Last Spanish Exploration of the Northwest Coast and the Attempt to Colonize Bodega Bay". California Historical Society Quarterly. Vol. 10, pp. 313-345, 1931.
- 8 R. F. Heizer and J. E. Mills. The People of the Mountain; the History of Tsurai Village in Trinidad Bay, 1775-1916. ms.
- 9 E. O. Essig, A. Ogden and C. J. DuFour. The Russians in California. California Historical Society, Spec. Publ. No. 7. San Francisco, 1932.
- 10 UCAS manuscript no. 21 concerning site SFr-1
- 11 A. E. Treganza. "Early American Lime Kilns in Marin County." Manuscript in press, State Division of Mines Guidebook to the San Francisco Bay Area.
- 12 F. F. Latta. "Historian Bares Friars' Laton, Kern Ventures" Fresno Bee (newspaper), Feb. 23, 1932.
- 13 Z. Leonard. The Narrative of Zenas Leonard, Fur-Trader and Trapper. Cleveland, 1904, pp. 229-231.
- 14 For which see H. H. Bancroft, History of California, 1801-1824. San Francisco, 1886, p. 530-537.
- 15 UCAS site no. Yol. 13.

- 16 The post-1848 evidence is so abundant that its recording would be an immense labor.
- 17 For example, the materials from the Burton Mound (J. P. Harrington. "Exploration of the Burton Mound, Santa Barbara, California," Bur. of Amer. Ethnol., Ann. Report 44, pp. 23-168, 1928 (p. 165 ff.)); the Spanish lance from Orange County (J. W. Winterbourne, "Report of the Sunny Hills Ranch Site No. 1". WPA Library Project 9708, Unit No. 1, Orange Co., Calif. (Typescript report, copy in UCAS library); the Drake Plate and Cermeno chinaware and spikes (citation in notes 1, 2.) Historic sites might be locatable or unlocatable, indicated by objects of Caucasian manufacture, or simply be known from documentary evidence.