

By Stephen S. Post, Deputy Director
OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDIES

ARCHAEOLOGISTS had many questions prior to beginning a new phase of excavations at the site of the New Mexico History Museum in downtown Santa Fe in the summer of 2003, perhaps none more important at the Office of Archaeological Studies (OAS) than, “What can we learn from this place that is not already known from previous archaeological and historical studies?” Staff had many questions about a parking lot that was shown as open space on historical maps and only mentioned in passing in historical documents. Was the site used for gardening and maintenance activities as historical sources led us to believe? Or was the story richer and more complex than we could predict or imagine, like so much of New Mexico’s past when you look below the surface?

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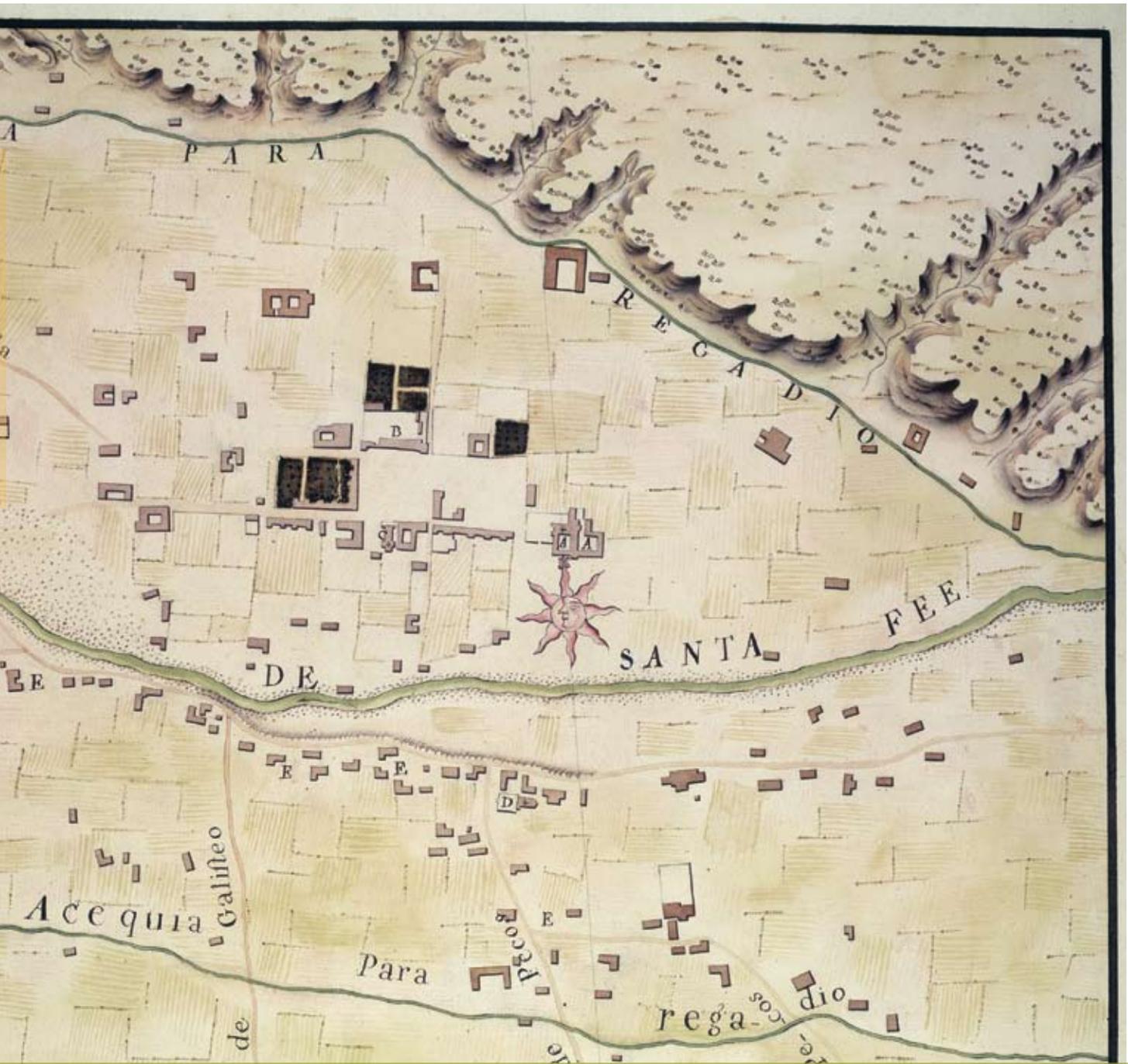
Buildings Lost and Found

Eighteenth-Century Foundations of a New Museum

The 1766 Josef Urrutia “Plano de la Santa Fee.” British Library Add. 17662.m.

Figures 1-5 courtesy of the Office of Archaeological Studies, 41.690, LA 111322.





"A Place Like No Other," a series inspired by the creation of the New Mexico History Museum, is devoted to exploring New Mexico history through the new research and recent insights of curators, artists, collections managers, educators, and archaeologists, work that will inspire lines of inquiry and exhibitions for years to come.

“Why was the richness and complexity of these finds such a surprise to many of us?”



Figure 1: 18th-century cobble building foundation with cobble-lined ditch alongside the foundation.



Figure 2: Horn cores, domesticated animal bone, and ash pile within the 18th-century butcher shop.

An OAS study completed in cooperation with the New Mexico History Museum and New Mexico Historic Preservation Division was accomplished in three phases spanning two years. In a 2003 *El Palacio* article I reported on the first phase of the excavation. Working in a narrow trench under the north wall of the Palace patio offices to stabilize the foundation and building, we exposed three layers of cobble foundations from pre- and post-Pueblo Revolt Spanish Colonial and Territorial period walls. The lowest foundation was from a free-standing wall that had enclosed a garden space behind the early Colonial Palace. The middle foundation, along with north-south perpendicular foundation stubs, was tantalizing evidence of an extensive eighteenth-century compound of buildings parallel to the Palace and extending into the area reserved for the New Mexico History Museum. The upper foundation supported the existing building, home of the present-day Palace print shop, first built between 1866 and 1868. This building would have separated the inner Palace courtyard from the open space beyond, which numerous Territorial governors had productively cultivated.

Partial answers to our questions about the age of the foundations, the buildings around them, and the people who occupied those buildings marked the initial effort. At the same time, many new questions were raised. During the second and third phases of the excavation, from the summer of 2003 to the fall of 2004, our excitement increased from day to day as we retrieved nearly 650,000 artifacts from deep deposits and discovered 260 cultural features in an area of barely 5,000 square feet, or less than 1/8 of an acre. Rather than a casually used open space as the maps and documents led us to believe, the ground beneath the New Mexico History Museum had been used as intensively as the Palace itself.

Why were the richness and complexity of these finds such a surprise to many of us? Part of the answer lies in historical

descriptions that repeatedly refer to the small size and unfortresslike appearance of the Palace and its surrounding property in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In 1760 Bishop Tamarón observed that Santa Fe had no presidio or formal fortress (Adams 1954). The 1766 “Plano de la Santa Fee...,” drawn by Josef Urrutia (see *page 39*), shows the Palace as a single linear building with a small building to the northwest surrounded by open space with a single shed or utility building and gardens and orchards (Moorhead

1975). One could argue from this evidence that the Palace was not even the most imposing or fortified structure in town at that time. But as our excavation revealed, major changes occurred at the New Mexico History Museum site during the middle to late 1700s.

True to the Urrutia map, at least until 1766, the site was irrigated and partly enclosed, with a garden that provided fresh fruits and vegetables; we found a filled-in cobble-lined irrigation ditch that brought water to the garden and orchard (see *Figure 1*). Since it did not exit the property, the ditch must have been built specifically for the Palace garden and orchard. Not shown on Urrutia's map was a circular structure twenty feet in diameter. Its lowest deposits contained abundant bones and horns of butchered sheep, goats, and cows (see *Figure 2*), suggesting that the circular structure had been a butcher shop that provided meat for Palace meals during the mid-eighteenth century. Ash piles on the structure floor may have been stockpiled for tanning hides or making tallow. The circular plan of the structure (see *Figure 3*) is curious: to my knowledge, no similar structures have been found at Colonial sites in New Mexico. We also found a short cobble foundation segment extending west under Lincoln Avenue which may be the remains of a shed shown on the Urrutia map that was abandoned before or when later buildings were built.

After the 1770s, this open but active space was covered by a building that paralleled the Palace. Adobe walls sat on top of foundations that were two-to-three feet wide and one-to-two feet deep, made from river cobbles that weighed between 10 and 100 pounds each. The remnant adobes were some of the largest reported in eighteenth-century buildings. These foundations, along with others found in utility trenches in Lincoln Avenue, form the outline of a single-story building 250 feet long and 40 feet wide that may have been subdivided into two rows of up to twenty 400- to 450-square-foot rooms. Our work resurrected this 10,000-square-foot building, mostly obliterated by early twentieth-century construction, after it had been buried for almost 100 years (see *Figure 4*).

The people who lived in this building, whether soldiers or servants, are indistinct historical figures. Their residences or barracks were spartan and simple. Comparable in size to barracks at presidio sites in Texas and northern Mexico, they were not as generous in size as local houses, which may partly explain why many eighteenth-century soldiers lived outside the barracks with their families. The floors were poured adobe on bare earth or a combination of earth and leveled adobe brick fragments—quite different from ornate seventeenth-century adobe floors in the west end of the Palace. Compacted-dirt floors, described by General Stephen Kearny in 1846, probably were the norm in all the living quarters at our site and a vernacular feature in most New Mexico houses.

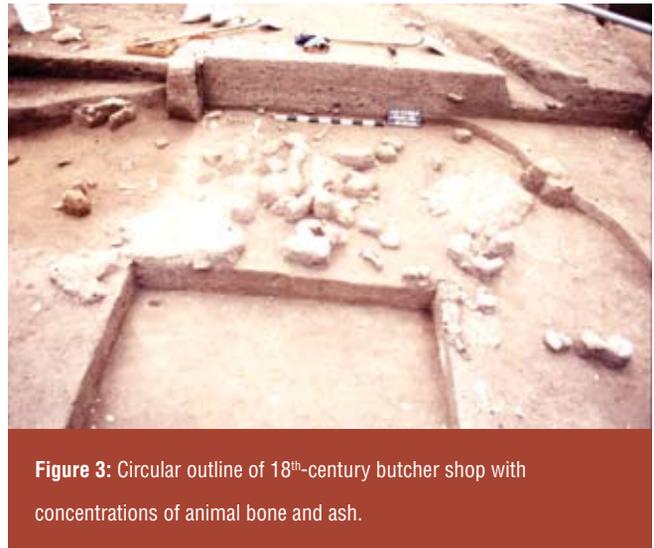


Figure 3: Circular outline of 18th-century butcher shop with concentrations of animal bone and ash.

“Our excavations yielded the most complete layout of eighteenth-century Spanish Colonial buildings and grounds to date.”

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Figure 4: 18th- century cobble foundations from 10,000-square-foot barracks and store house beneath the New Mexico History Museum site.



Figure 5: Late-18th- century fireplace in excavated cross section showing remodeling episodes.

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Corner fireplaces, or *fogónes*, were a mainstay of Spanish Colonial and Mexican period architecture in New Mexico. We excavated four rooms with corner fireplaces: two had been severely damaged by building demolition. Two well-preserved examples had been remodeled many times (see *Figure 5*), which accounts for the abundant fire-reddened adobe fragments we found in refuse deposits. These *fogónes* required yearly replastering and repair, and one of them had undergone structural redesign. The posts that once stood in arced arrays of postholes, found as successive remodeling layers were removed, may have supported a fireplace hood, above a cooking hearth. Other postholes, west of the fireplace, suggest an elevated shelf or bench similar to the “shepherd’s bed” described in E. Boyd’s 1973 *El Palacio* article. These simply constructed fireplaces comforted the occupants in cold weather and gave them a place to cook their meals. Although we know very little about the hardworking people who lived in these rooms, evidence of their collective contribution to the rich traditions of New Mexico was there for us to witness and record.

Archaeology at the New Mexico History Museum site shows that there is still much to learn about a past that is sometimes deeply buried and lost to recent memory. During 2003 and 2004, our expanded excavations yielded the most complete layout of eighteenth-century Spanish Colonial buildings and grounds to date. As it turned out, even if adobe walls did not survive, their massive cobble foundations could still be found. Our excavation provided a physical link to New Mexico’s ever changing culture through the foundations, artifacts, and earthworks we uncovered. As people explore in the new museum, they will learn that for some, daily eighteenth-century life was born of a heritage brought from Spain, transported through Mexico, and transformed in New Mexico. ■

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