

Excelsior Train Station

5ME7351.1, Mesa County

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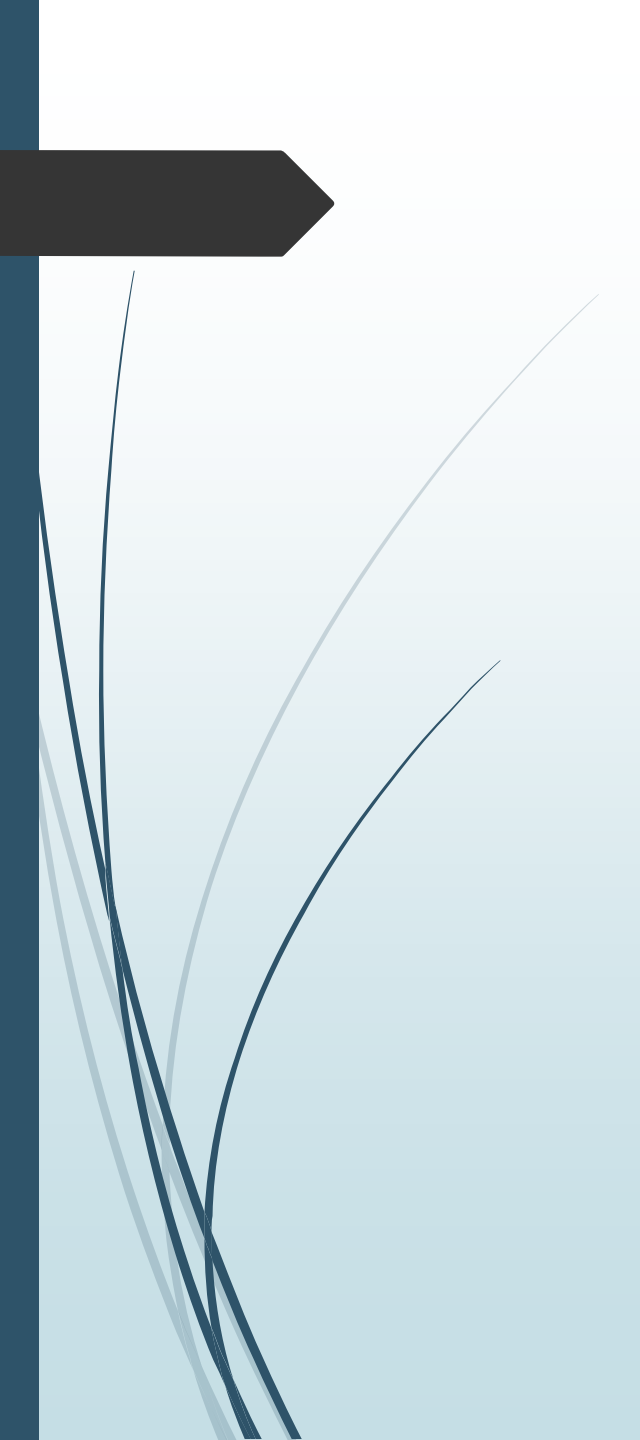


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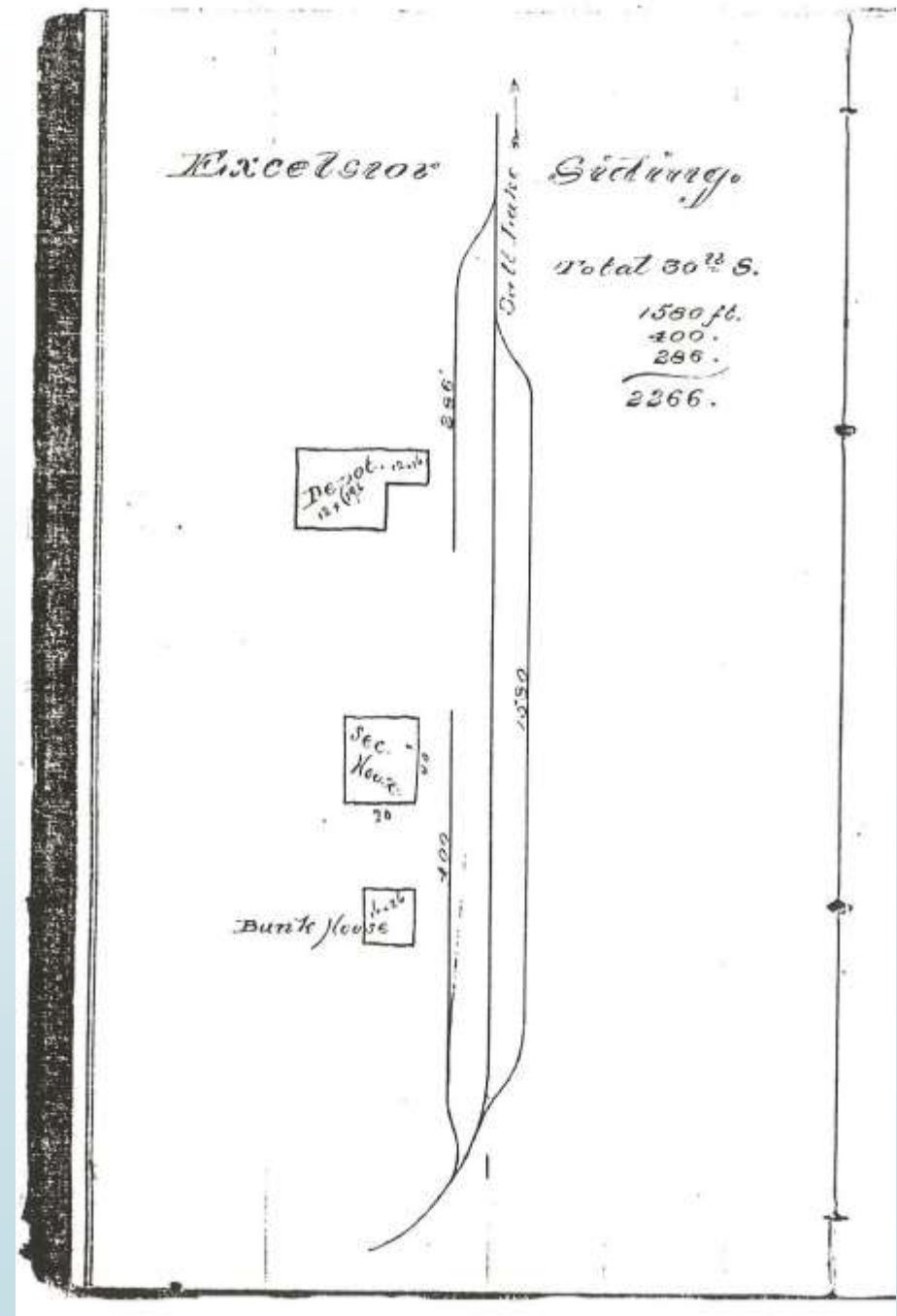
Project Background

- Originally recorded by Brian O'Neil with Grand River Institute in 1994. Artifact samples were collected and curated at the Museum of the West
- Vandalism was noted within refuse piles
- BLM acknowledged a vandalism case was opened but had no documentation relating to it
- Long term employees indicated that a college professor had went to the site, collected artifacts from the surface and subsurface, and gave a presentation on the findings. The case was dropped when the artifacts were turned over to the BLM Grand Junction Field Office

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- Excelsior Station was a stop along the narrow gauge railroad line between Grand Junction and Salt Lake City.
 - Construction was completed in 1883
 - Route was bypassed with the construction of standard gauge in 1890.

Siding map

Illustration
showing the
depot, section
house, and
bunk house





Previous investigations at the site...

- Five features: Foundations for the depot, section house, and bunkhouse; as well as depressions indicating a vandal's pit and possible outhouse
- Artifacts: fragmented bottle glass and dishware, industrial artifacts relating to the maintenance and upkeep of the railroad, and items necessary for living on site, including containers for food and food preparation

Museum Collections

Analysis at the Museum of the West in Grand Junction, Colorado indicated artifacts had been collected from the site that are typically associated with Chinese railroad workers



I-Ching tokens

Museum Collections

Analysis at the Museum of the West in Grand Junction, Colorado indicated artifacts had been collected from the site that are typically associated with Chinese railroad workers



Opium tin



Grant investigation

The investigation was divided into two parts:

1. Documentation and recovery of artifacts: mapping the original grade, identification of artifacts with special attention to maker's marks; influence of station on local economy; and a search of the surrounding area for undiscovered features/artifacts.



Ethnicity... Chinese occupation?

- 2) Determining the cultural ethnicity of those at the site. It is generally accepted that Chinese were not employed as construction/track workers on rail sites in Colorado. The previously recorded artifacts may have been used/collected by other Euro-Americans and the presence of these particular artifacts was not considered as conclusive evidence of Chinese occupation.

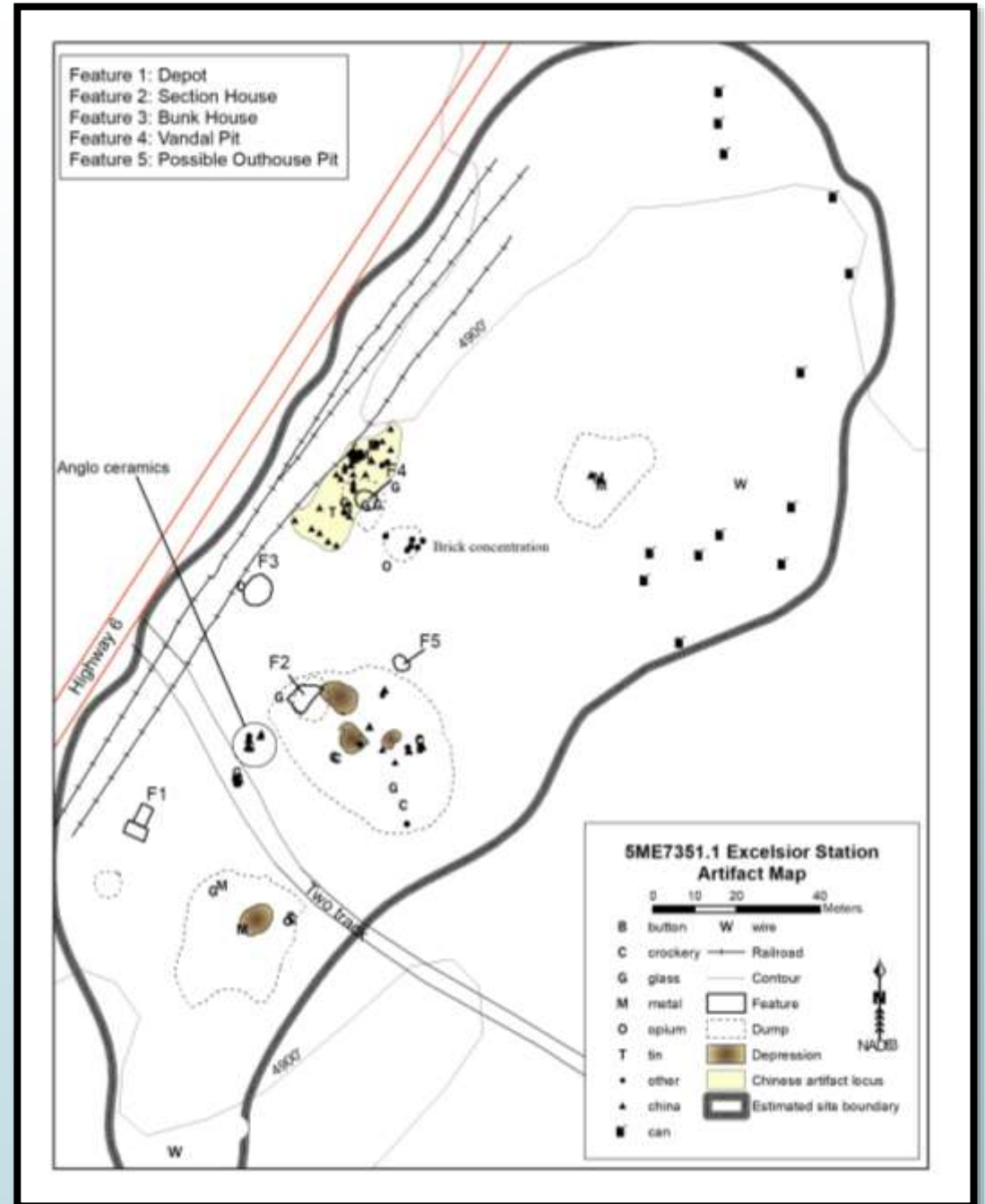


Methodology

- Mapping of surface artifacts and features
- Metal detection conducted throughout the site to identify subsurface features and artifacts
- Establishment of excavation grid units
- Collection of any ethnically identifiable artifacts. The site is a very visible and well known site among railroad aficionados, so artifact recovery was a high priority

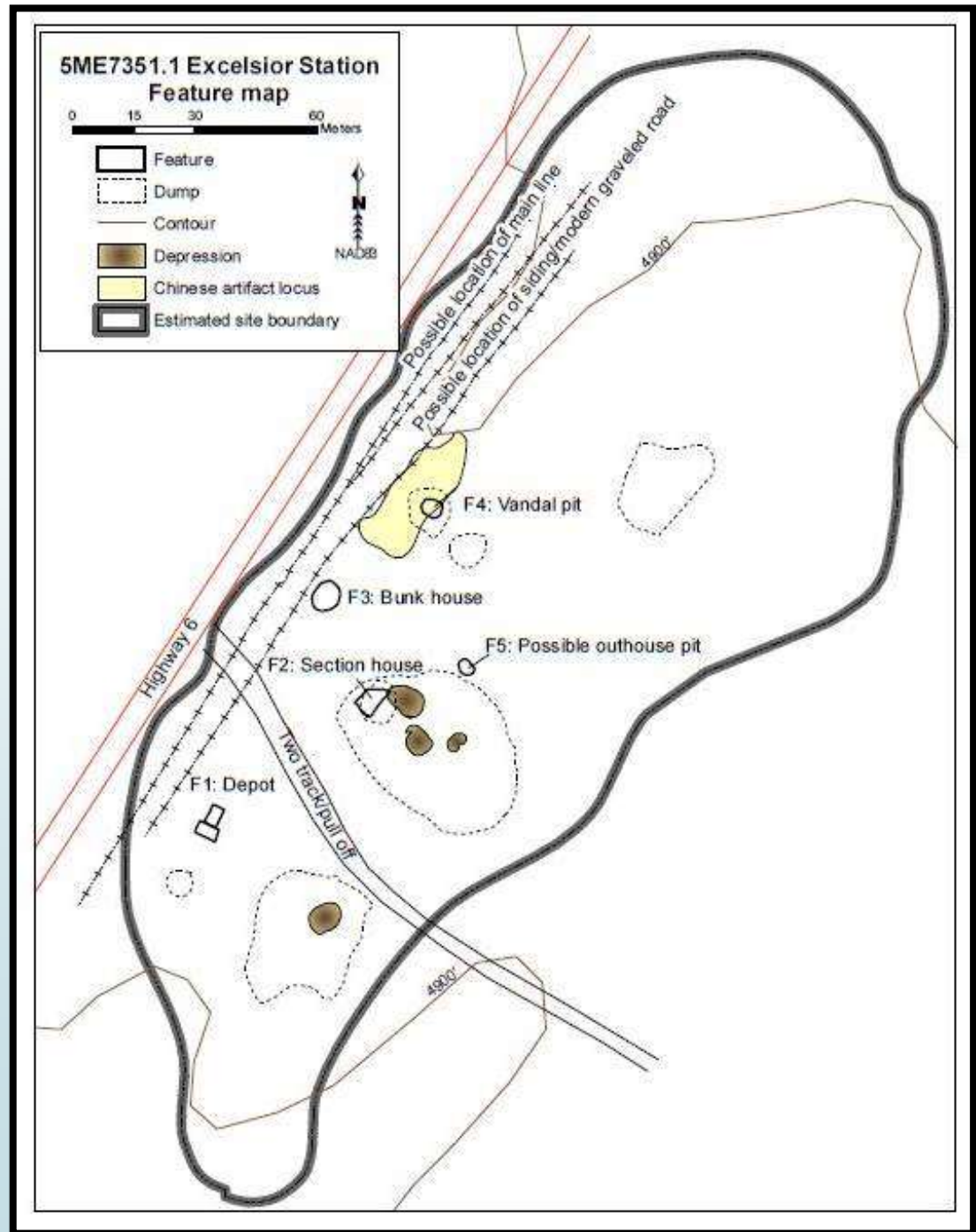
Mapping

Artifacts and building foundations were first mapped. Several dumps and clusters were located and mapped. Artifacts were consistent with previous reports.



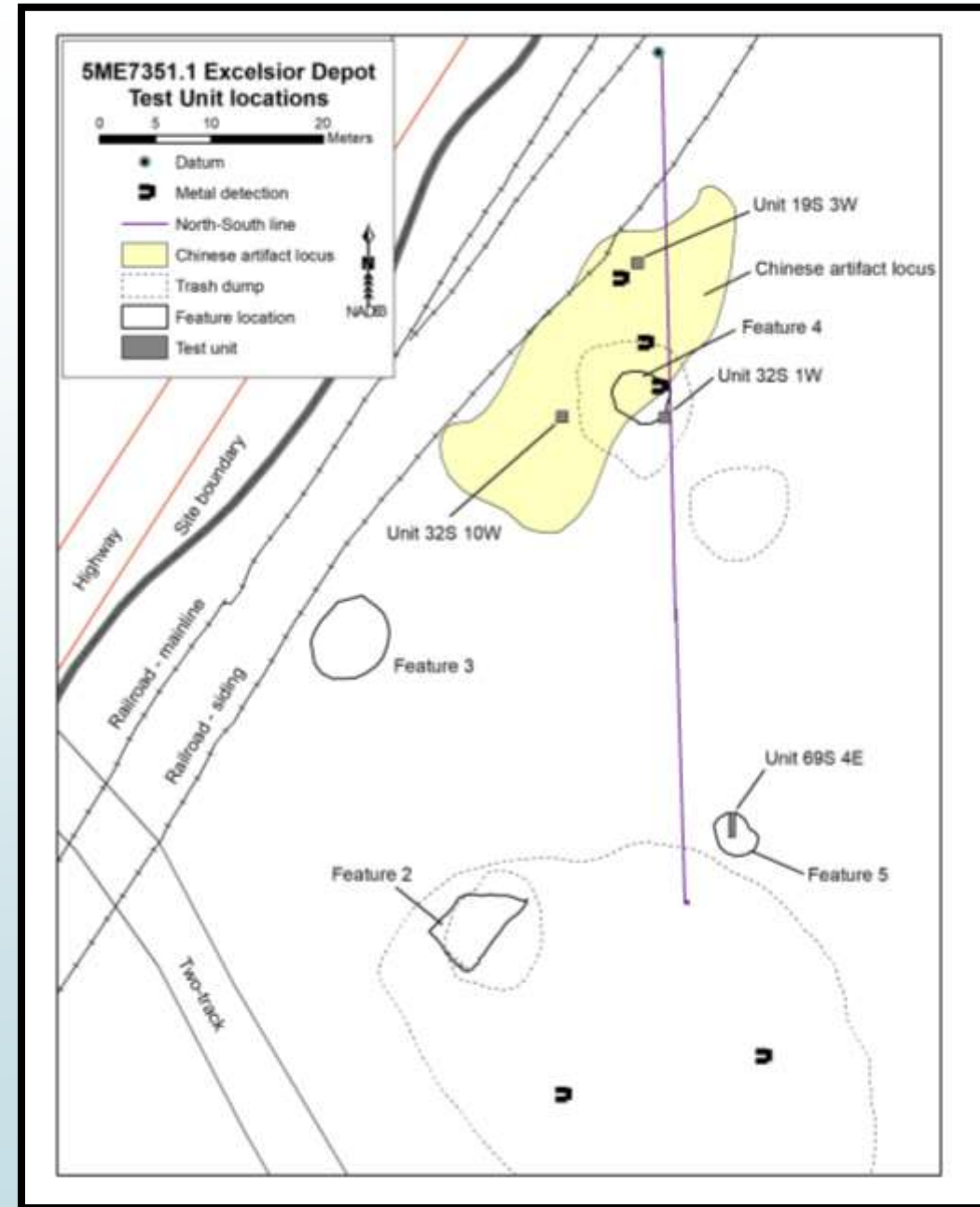
Mapping

Feature identification was determined by using historic maps (with respect to the building locations) and artifact clusters. Feature 4, the vandal's pit, was near a distinct artifact locus.



Mapping

After clusters and features were identified, the focus shifted to metal detecting and testing. Units were established at an area exhibiting unique artifacts as well as a possible outhouse.





Findings

- Notable historic artifacts included sewer pipe, buttons, white utilitarian tableware (“Ironstone China”), crock fragments, glass bottle fragments and metal fragments. Cans were plentiful.
- Metal artifacts were typical of turn-of-the-century housing as well as railroad construction and operations. These included items that used for containing, preparing, and serving food, clothing items, as well as items associated with the upkeep of railroads.



CHINESE ARTIFACTS

THE SURFACE INVENTORY AND EXCAVATIONS FOR EXCELSIOR STATION IDENTIFIED A DISTINCT CONCENTRATION OF CHINESE ARTIFACTS WITHIN THE SITE. THESE ARTIFACTS INCLUDED TABLEWARE AND TEAWARE FRAGMENTS, UTILITARIAN VESSEL FRAGMENTS, PAINTED JARS OR POSSIBLE GINGER JARS, BRASS OPIUM TINS, AND POSSIBLE FRAGMENTS OF AN OPIUM PIPE BOWL.



RESEARCH SOURCES

IDENTIFICATION

We worked with a large online community to identify recovered artifact
fragments

Christopher Merritt with the University of Montana

Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project

at Stanford University

(archaeo_rr_worker@lists.Stanford.edu)

RESEARCH SOURCES



RESEARCH SOURCES

Chinese Railroad Workers *in North America Project* at Stanford University

北美鐵路華工研究工程
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RESEARCH SOURCES

Other published comparative collections

Asian American Comparative Collection – Pricilla Wegars

What's in the Pot? An Emic Study of Chinese Brown Glazed Stoneware

– Jeannie Yang and Virginia Hellmann

Pottery Relics Used in 19th Century Central Pacific Railroad Chinese Workers Camp

– Chris Graves

Chinese Comparative Collection Archaeology of the Overseas Chinese (Vol 1 and 2)

– Gary Weisz



Ceramics

Three different styles of Chinese semi-porcelain tableware were identified:

- Bamboo Style, also known as Three Circles and Dragonfly (Swatow)
- Celadon, also known as Winter Green
- And Four Seasons, also known as Four Flowers



Ceramics

No makers marks were found on the tableware, although a portion of a Chinese character was visible on one rim shard. All of the ceramic styles represented are markedly different than those commonly imported for American use during this time period. These styles fall into a category of trade goods imported along with spices, silks, and lacquered ware.

Fragments found at Excelsior represented:

- Rice bowls
- Tea/liquor cup
- Spoon



Bamboo Style

- Bamboo design is described as being decorated with blue or gray vertical designs intended to represent shoots and leaves of the bamboo plant
- Elements include three circles, a longevity character or dragonfly motif, and floral decorations with both round leaves and thinner, pointed leaves
- Ceramics of this style are found on nearly every Chinese site examined in the United States
- Most common style of bowl found on Central Pacific, Southern Pacific, and Northern Pacific due to its low cost
- Bamboo design is reserved almost exclusively on rice bowls and is common prior to the 1890s, after which Celadon and Four Seasons gain popularity

Bamboo Style

Fragments from
original site recording



Bamboo Style

Fragments
collected
from grant
investigation



Bamboo Style

Example of Bamboo Style rice bowls from Chinese railroad camps (Weisz 2012).



Bamboo Style

Example of Bamboo
Style rice bowls from
Chinese railroad
camps (Weisz 2012).





Celadon Style

- Celadon is a bluish green to pale green porcelain
- Variety of dishware including large bowls, spoons, saucers, sauce plates, and small cups
- Originally produced for the wealthy but became popular with working class Chinese immigrants in the late 1800s

Celadon Style

Spoon handle fragments
from the grant project



Celadon Style

Example of Celadon bowl, tea cups, sauce dish, liquor cup, and plate (Weisz 2012).



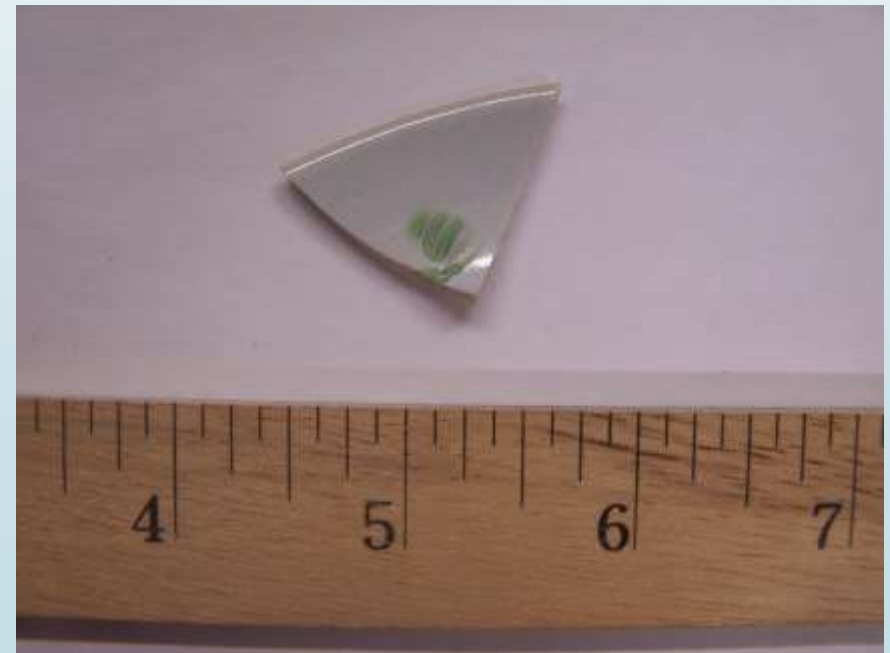


Four Seasons

- Four Seasons uses four separate flower motifs using a hand painted overglaze polychrome, each representing one of the four seasons
- Spring is symbolized by an orchid, summer by a plum blossom, fall by a chrysanthemum, and winter by bamboo
- The style occurs on a variety of shapes and sizes with serving bowls being the most common form.
- Comparable to Celadon in cost but substantially higher in price than Bamboo.

Four Seasons

Four artifacts of this style were identified; three collected during the grant project and one that was collected during the initial site recording.



Four Seasons

Example of Four Seasons styles.



(University of Montana)



(Weisz 2012)



Glazed stoneware

- These common crockery vessels generally contained food items such as pickled duck eggs, spices, dried fish, pickled vegetables, and beans.
- Consisted of spouted jars, liquor bottles, wide-mouthed jars, globular jars, straight-sided jars, barrel jars, and pans.
- Although they would have initially held a specific type of food, they were reused as general food containers.
- Most crockery pieces found at Excelsior is of the brown glazed variety, although painted fragments were found as well.
- Differ from other stoneware fragments found within the trash dumps on site associated with Euro-American artifacts.

Glazed stoneware



Brown glazed foot-ring from
Initial investigation of
Excelsior



Example of glazed spouted
jar (University of Montana)

Glazed stoneware

Fragments of painted stoneware from grant assessment.



Glazed stoneware



Examples of painted stoneware from Central Pacific Railroad camps (Graves 2007).

Opium Pipe

- Because of their fragile nature, opium pipe bowls were easily broken and discarded making them some of the most commonly recovered artifacts relating to opium use on archaeological sites
- Orange, terra-cotta color is the most common for opium pipe bowls, though there is a range of other colors and a variety of shapes



Fragments discovered during grant assessment

Opium Pipe

Example of an
opium pipe bowl
from German
Gulch
(University of
Montana)



Opium tin

- Lai Yuen was one of the most popular brands of opium
- Exported from a district in southeast Canton
- Opium tins were collected from the vandalism case as well as the grant assessment.
- Example of a Lai Yuen opium tin (Sinn 2005)



Opium tin



Lai Yuen opium tins were recovered from Excelsior (left, vandalism collection; right, grant assessment)

Unidentified artifact

Apparent Chinese style

List serve: 2012, 2018

Lid for inkwell?

Brush holder for a scribe or
railroad timekeeper?





Conclusion

- Both Chinese and Euro-Americans smoked opium; although, it has been hypothesized that Euro-American consumption was recreational and therefore limited primarily to opium dens.
- Tableware utilized by Euro-Americans was markedly different from that used by Chinese immigrants. Overall, there was very little mixing of artifacts at Excelsior. The locus containing Chinese artifacts was clear and few artifacts associated with Euro-Americans were present.
- Food preparation preferences are known among Chinese immigrants. They tended to adhere to traditional dietary practices of food preparation and consumption.
- The grant assessment provided definitive evidence of a Chinese presence at the Excelsior, either during construction or after.

References

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- Graves, Chris (2007) Pottery Relics Used in 19th Century Central Pacific Railroad Chinese Worker Camp, Central Pacific Railroad Photographic History Museum. Electronic document, http://cpr.org/Museum/Ephemera/CPRR_Chinese_Pottery.html
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- Wegars, Priscilla (2010) Asian American Comparative Collection. Electronic document, www.uiweb.uidaho.edu/aacc