

# MISSION SANTA CLARA IN A CHANGING URBAN ENVIRONMENT

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Since its secularization in the 1830s, Mission Santa Clara de Asís and its associated grounds have seen major transformations. These changes include the gradual abandonment of the mission by its native inhabitants, the Californio and early Anglo-American use of mission structures, as well as the founding and growth of Santa Clara College (now Santa Clara University) and the City of Santa Clara. Through the analysis of historic maps, photographs, and archaeological findings, this paper provides an overview of the far-reaching physical changes that have fundamentally altered the original mission-era landscape, including the mission churches, cemeteries, and neophyte village. Information is drawn from historical and archaeological investigations into the lives of Native Americans at Mission Santa Clara, as well as an ongoing project I am conducting with undergraduate students and faculty from the departments of Anthropology and Environmental Studies and Sciences to record historic structures and other features in a geographic information system, or GIS. The massive scale of landscape changes over the past two centuries provide important context from which to consider the implications of future development on the preservation and study of the physical remnants of Mission Santa Clara.

Two factors make the investigation of Mission Santa Clara in the broader environment a challenging endeavor. The first, as documented by previous researchers (Spearman 1963; Skowronek and Wizorek 1997), is that Mission Santa Clara moved rather frequently. Through nearly a century of research, we now have a good idea of the characteristics of Santa Clara's five separate mission churches – six if one counts the current mission church which was built in the 1920s after the fifth mission was destroyed in a fire (Figure 1). The second complicating factor, and the one that I want to highlight here, is that most of the mission's historic-era landscape--especially that relating to its Native American inhabitants--has been hidden by subsequent growth and development. Today, few original structures remain above ground, so any other preserved elements are

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physically underneath the modern campus of Santa Clara University (SCU) and adjacent private holdings (Figure 2). This buried geography includes the third and fourth mission churches, portions of two mission quadrangles, and the associated cemeteries. The neophyte *ranchería* and other mission outbuildings have similarly vanished from view—their full extent is still unknown but these areas are certainly more expansive than early researchers believed.

One of the most fascinating changes that Mission Santa Clara underwent was the gradual transition of the fifth mission complex from humble adobe structures into an imposing Italianate institution. This history has been well-documented elsewhere (McKevitt 1979; Spearman 1963), but it is worth noting that when the Jesuits took possession of Mission Santa Clara in 1851, contemporary observers described its physical condition as “wretched” and “sadly out of repair” (McKevitt 1979:26). The poor state of the church and other buildings was due in part to the fact that even by the early date of 1851, most of the former mission lands and structures had been obtained by Californio settlers or appropriated by Anglo-American squatters. Yet the Jesuits managed to retain control of the fifth mission quadrangle, and beginning in the 1860s they set about remodeling the low adobe buildings of the former mission into structures more befitting their fledgling institution of higher learning (Figure 3). Additional stories were added to the eastern and western wings of the quadrangle, and the original stone foundations and adobe walls were encased in wooden siding. The mission church was similarly redone in dramatic fashion, taking on a more classical appearance featuring two large bell towers (McKevitt 1979:69-70).

Further changes to the fifth mission quadrangle took place in the early twentieth century with the demolition of the former padres’ residence and the fire of 1926 that consumed the mission church. The mission was rebuilt as a somewhat more ornate version of its 1825 incarnation, and the western wing of the quadrangle has also been restored to reflect its colonial-era appearance. These changes are well documented in Skowronek and Wizorek’s (1997) synthesis of Santa Clara archaeology, but additional portions of the fifth mission complex have been revealed since then. For example, small segments of foundations of the original 1820s quadrangle were noted in the lawn between the current church and the remaining portion of the west wing during trenching for a sewer project in 2010 (D’Oro et al. 2011). The stone foundations for the adobe church, as well as more recent American-period alterations, were also briefly uncovered in 2013 during the university’s campus beautification campaign. These



Figure 1. Reconstructed mission church on the campus of Santa Clara University.

glimpses of the past are important reminders that the reconstructed mission only loosely aligns with historical reality.

Yet there are two critical features of the mission landscape that have been even more obscured by urban development over the past century and a half: the *ranchería*, or neighborhood, where the mission's native inhabitants lived and the mission cemeteries where native people and others were laid to rest during the colonial period. Often the beautiful mission churches occupy center stage in the popular imagination of Spanish California, but in reality, the missions were as much native towns as they were European centers. Many thousands of Native Californians lived and worked at Mission Santa Clara, including people from the Ohlone (Costanoan) and Yokuts ethnolinguistic groups.

During its peak years, the mission was home to upwards of 1400 Native Californians, compared to just two missionaries and a handful of soldiers (Milliken 2002). And tragically, the Santa Clara mission cemeteries hold the remains of approximately 8,000 individuals, most of whom were Native Californians. So in this sense, the *ranchería* and the colonial-era cemeteries are an equally fundamental part of the landscape of Mission Santa Clara (and indeed all California missions) as the mission church. These areas have been disproportionately affected by historic landscape changes and, due to their unobtrusive nature, are perhaps at greater risk for disturbance during future urban development.

### *Rediscovering the Neophyte Ranchería*

Despite the peripatetic nature of the Santa Clara mission church, the neophyte *ranchería* appears to have remained in the same place for most of the mission's existence, ca. 1781-1840s. Several eyewitness accounts of the *ranchería* exist, including *informes* from the 1780s that mention a "village of straw huts" (Skowronek 2006:133). In 1792, Captain George Vancouver described the neophyte village as composed of "mean huts

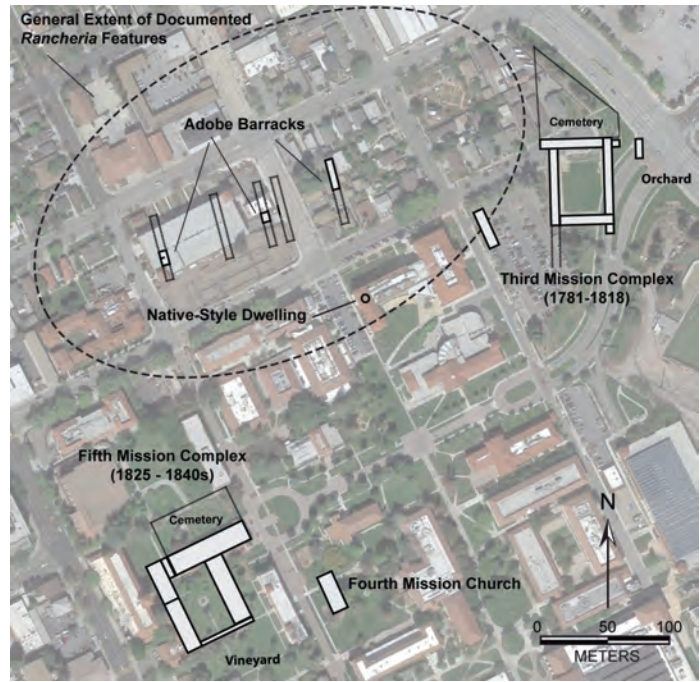


Figure 2. Mission-era landscape overlay on modern Santa Clara University campus.

Figure 3. Santa Clara College, ca. 1865. Image courtesy of Archives and Special Collections, Santa Clara University Library.



or wigwams” but also remarked on the construction of adobe apartments for married neophytes, which had begun earlier that year (Eastwood 1924:278-280).

Various missionaries and visitors to Santa Clara offered additional glimpses of these adobe structures in the ensuing decades, including an account from 1826 by Captain F.W. Beechey who remarked upon the “five rows of buildings for the accommodation of 1,400 Indians” (Beechey 1831:16). One of the latest

depictions of the *ranchería* is from an 1842 sketch by G.M. Waseurtz af Sandels (Figure 4). In addition to several adobe structures in the foreground and near the mission church, at least four rows of adobe structures extend out of the frame to the right. These four buildings are part of the native *ranchería*, and show that many of its structures were still standing in the post-secularization era of the early 1840s. However, around this same time, the indigenous use of the *ranchería* came to an end. An account from 1841-1842, for example, mentions the “long line of huts, formerly occupied by the Indians, which are now destroyed, excepting a few” (Wilkes 1845, in Shoup and Milliken 1999:125).

Today, only one mission-era structure is still standing in the former *ranchería*, the Santa Clara Woman’s Club Adobe. This building represents two rooms of an adobe neophyte barracks, which originally included at least eight rooms. Sometime in the 1830s or 1840s, the structure was acquired by José Peña, a former soldier, and his wife Gertrudis. Their daughter-in-law, Concepcion, apparently lived in the northern two rooms until the 1880s (Garcia 1997:15). The exact chronology of the structure’s use has not been fully reconstructed, but in a drawing titled “Santa Clara, 1856” the building is depicted as a long linear adobe building with a tile roof (Kuchel and Dresel 1857). A photo from the late 1860s shows the remnant northern section as well as a more southerly portion of the structure, which had by then been transformed architecturally (Figure 5, next page). Later photographs show wall remnants extending south from the Woman’s Club Adobe, suggesting that the two structures were originally joined, a point that has been corroborated by recent archaeological excavations in the area between the two structures (Panich et al. 2014). In 1891, the southern end of the original structure was torn down to allow for the construction of a new residence. Newspaper accounts mention that “Indian arrows and bows” as well as human remains were discovered during the demolition (*Evening News* 1891a, 1891b). The articles mistakenly attribute the structure



Figure 4. Drawing of Mission Santa Clara by G. M. Waseurtz af Sandels, 1842. Image courtesy of Archives and Special Collections, Santa Clara University Library.

to the founding of the mission in 1777, but nonetheless correctly identify it as part of the original mission landscape.

The fact that nearly all of the post-mission historical documentation and photographs focus on the Woman's Club Adobe suggests that it may have been the only such structure to have been left standing into the second half of the nineteenth century. *Ranchería* structures are completely missing from the Black survey of 1854, and by 1855, testimony given in a



**Figure 5.** Remnants of adobe neophyte barracks, ca. 1868. The structure in the background houses the Santa Clara Woman's Club. Image courtesy of Archives and Special Collections, Santa Clara University Library.

property dispute indicated that the main *ranchería* area, located “two blocks west” of the third mission site, was nothing but “piles of ruins” and rough ground (Hendry and Bowman 1940:678). The 1856 drawing by Kuchel and Dresel shows this core area of the *ranchería* nearly vacant aside from the future Woman's Club Adobe. As part of the GIS project, we are plotting the locations of American-period structures depicted in various Sanborn Fire Insurance maps that date back as early as 1887. In this same area, the post-mission landscape included residential dwellings as well as a brewery, a bottling plant, two small bowling alleys, a German-American social club, and a grain mill. The landscape of the former *ranchería* continued to evolve over the next thirty years, as seen through the comparison of Sanborn maps from 1887 and 1915 (Figure 6; and see Baxter 2009).

It is understandable, then, that knowledge of the indigenous *ranchería* was almost completely lost less than a century after Mission Santa Clara was acquired by the Jesuits. To be sure, local lore suggested that the Woman's Club Adobe had been part of the neophyte *ranchería* (e.g., Piñedo in Webb 1998:19), yet one of the first systematic surveys of Spanish and Mexican-era structures in Santa Clara (Hendry and Bowman 1940:667-672) rejected that notion. Instead, Hendry and Bowman argued that the *ranchería* was confined to the space immediately to the west of the third mission site, where they included a depiction of a U-shaped adobe structure that they speculated housed the mission's indigenous population (Hendry and Bowman 1940:690-691). Some sort of structure may have existed in that area, as indicated by the presence of adobe ruins noted in the Lewis and Henly map of 1854 (see Hylkema 1995:93) and suggested by architectural ceramics recovered in archaeological investigations on the same block (Greenwalt et al. 2006). However, recent research indicates that the *ranchería* extended far to the west of this area (see Figure 2).

Only in the last decade or so has the actual spatial footprint of the native *ranchería* been revealed by archaeological investigations undertaken in advance of SCU construction projects (Allen 2010; Allen et al. 2010; Garlinghouse 2015). In addition to the Woman’s Club Adobe, portions of at least four other adobe barracks have been documented in recent archaeological mitigation, confirming the general layout of the *ranchería* as depicted by Beechey and Waseurtz of Sandels. The large footprint of many of these projects has also enabled archaeologists to understand the broader landscape in between and beyond the adobe neophyte barracks (Allen 2010). One important find is a native-style dwelling, a form of architecture that must have been used at most if not all California missions but which has not been well-documented archaeologically (Figure 7). Dozens of pit features have also been uncovered at Santa Clara, including pits that were possibly used as hearths, storage areas, and/or wells. Some of these pits contained items--such as thousands of shell beads--that may have been deposited as part of Native Californian mourning ceremonies (Panich 2014, 2015).

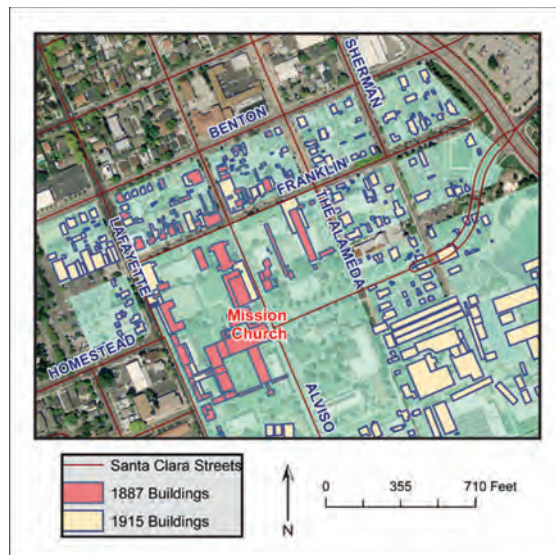


Figure 6. Detail of GIS plotting of structures from 1887 and 1915 Sanborn Fire Insurance maps. Figure by Claire Parchem and Morgan Cowick, with input from Ben Frasier, Carlos Carrillo, Kelsey Baker, and Iris Stewart-Frey.

In this way, the archaeology of Mission Santa Clara’s native neighborhood holds great potential for illuminating the everyday lives of mission neophytes. Recent research has uncovered details of Native American life at Santa Clara that largely escaped mention in the historical record, including activities that may have only been carried out in the relative privacy of their own neighborhood. That the native *ranchería* at Mission Santa Clara has, thus far, proven to be so well preserved under the later American-period urban landscape has been a pleasant surprise from an archaeological perspective. Yet the very nature of these subsurface features also means that we simply don’t know how much of this hidden mission-era landscape is left.

### ***Commemorating Mission Cemeteries***

Like the neophyte *ranchería*, the colonial-era cemeteries of Mission Santa Clara are today largely obscured by the modern landscape. The two largest cemeteries are associated with the third and fifth mission churches, and are currently on or near the Santa Clara University campus. Beginning in 1851, the Jesuits began adapting the former Franciscan mission to their own needs, and the cemetery associated with the fifth mission church was closed. Subsequent construction included a brick chapel for Santa Clara students dating to the 1880s in the area north of the mission church. The erection of the students’ chapel no doubt disturbed mission-era burials within the cemetery; one perhaps fanciful account indicates that “moccasins, beads, Indian garments and bones were dug up” as the chapel was being built

(*Evening News* 1917). Portions of the cemetery were left intact, although one Father Colligan reported that he had conducted exploratory excavations there (*Evening News* 1917), while other Jesuits apparently used the area to reinter skeletons discovered elsewhere on campus (*Evening News* 1906). The students' chapel was destroyed by fire along with the fifth mission church in 1926, and that event along with the reconstruction of the mission church further disturbed the colonial-era cemetery. Today, a large portion of the fifth mission cemetery is an enclosed rose garden. As such, it is largely protected from future development, aside from the occasional discovery of human remains outside of the adobe perimeter wall during campus construction projects (Skowronek and Wizorek 1997:79-85).



**Figure 7. The archaeological remains of the native-style dwelling uncovered during archaeological excavations prior to the construction of SCU's Leavey School of Business.**

The majority of Santa Clara's mission-era burials occurred in the cemetery associated with the third mission church, and sadly, this cemetery has seen a number of disturbances since the mid-nineteenth century. It is unclear when exactly the cemetery was closed; the last burials were probably sometime between the abandonment of the third mission church in 1818 and the completion of the fifth mission church in 1825. The cemetery was apparently marked or remembered as late as the mid-1850s, as revealed in the various survey maps of that era, but is otherwise poorly represented in the documentary record for the late colonial and early American periods (Hendry and Bowman 1940:678). However, the gradual development of the area during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century significantly impacted the cemetery. The cemetery is outside of the scope of the 1887 Sanborn Map, but by 1891 Franklin Street clearly extends into the former *campo santo*, and by 1915 multiple structures are present within the main cemetery area (see Figure 6). Utility crews discovered mission-era burials on at least five occasions between 1907 and 1938, including multiple burials that were interred with shell beads (Hendry and Bowman 1940:679-684; Hylkema 1995:41-44). More recently, construction activities associated with the re-routing of the Camino Real in the 1980s revealed several clusters of human bone from a minimum of 11 individuals (Hylkema 1995). Gas line maintenance in 2009 resulted in the controlled excavation of portions of an additional 13 individuals from the same area (Leventhal et al. 2011).

Despite these impacts, and the fact that it is today totally obscured by modern development, the cemetery of the third mission site remains an important component of Santa Clara's cultural landscape. The Muwekma Ohlone Tribe recently renamed the cemetery in the Chocheño/Tamien Ohlone language, calling it the Clareño Muwékma Ya Túnnešte Nómmo [Where the Clareño Indians are Buried] Site (Leventhal et al. 2011).

### ***Conclusion: Development, Preservation, and Archaeology***

Today, the scale of construction within the former mission grounds continues to advance, with significant cultural resource management work going on almost continuously. For example, nearly two years of archaeological excavation were required to document and remove mission-era remains within the footprints of a new university parking structure and academic building, which together cover most of a city block within the heart of the *ranchería*. Based on these excavations, the materials from which are still being analyzed, we will know more than ever before about the layout of the mission and the details of Native American life at Santa Clara. Current and future development plans will expose even more of the mission-era landscape. A new SCU law school facility is planned for an area directly adjacent to the third mission site; preliminary work in the summer of 2015 exposed foundations and other features associated with the mission quadrangle. Just to the north of the SCU campus, a private developer is planning a massive apartment and retail complex that will encompass three city blocks. Given recent archaeological discoveries relating to the neophyte *ranchería* on neighboring parcels (e.g., Garlinghouse 2015; Greenwalt et al. 2006; Panich et al. 2014), it is likely that this development will also require the mitigation of substantial mission-era deposits.

While these large-scale archaeological projects enhance our knowledge of the past, they represent a double-edged sword. It is a truism in archaeology that the material remains of the past are a non-renewable resource: once a site is excavated, it can never be put back exactly as it was. The physical remnants of the neophyte *ranchería* and mission cemeteries at Mission Santa Clara have survived more than a century and a half of urban development surprisingly well. But the archaeological record of Mission Santa Clara is finite, and given the pace and scale of construction, it is rapidly diminishing. The preservation and conservation of colonial-era architecture and aboveground landscape elements are important and worthy goals, but the subsurface remains of the California missions are also in need of preservation. These buried elements of the mission landscape offer testimony to the thousands of Native Californians who lived, worked, and died at the missions, and whose voices are too often muted in the history of Spanish and Mexican California. A thoughtful and concerted effort to preserve these hidden landscapes is perhaps even more important at places like Santa Clara where the above ground features are so few and the archaeological record so incredibly rich.

### ***Acknowledgments***

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