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Archeology of Bank One Ballpark, Phoenix, Arizona

With the coming of professional baseball to Phoenix, Arizona, it was necessary to construct a stadium to house the Arizona Diamondbacks. In a partnership between the Maricopa County Stadium District, the taxpayers, and the Diamondbacks organization, the stadium was built in downtown Phoenix in the southeast corner of the original townsite. Archeological investigations were voluntarily undertaken and done by Archaeological Consulting Services Ltd. of Tempe as a sub-consultant to SCS Engineers. During more than one year of excavations that tested 22.2 acres of downtown Phoenix, some 379 features were recorded, 180 of which were fully excavated. Over 100,000 artifacts were recovered and analyzed. Most features and artifacts were associated with the historic settlement of Phoenix, but a small portion were prehistoric and provided information on the agricultural practices of the ancient Hohokam. All data from the excavation have been published and the artifacts curated with the Phoenix Museum of History where they are being used to educate the citizens of Arizona on the history of their capital city.

Excavation in progress.



The Team

Putting together cultural resource investigations the size of the Bank One Ballpark project is very similar to the task of fielding a new baseball team. It takes management, sponsors, team leaders, and cooperative, hard-working players. When professional baseball came to Arizona in 1995, the newly organized Arizona Diamondbacks needed a stadium to be constructed in downtown Phoenix. The Maricopa County Stadium District contracted with SCS Engineers to conduct environmental investigations prior to construction. Archaeological Consulting Services, Ltd. (ACS) acted as a subconsultant for archeological testing and data recovery. Personnel from ACS included Shereen Lerner, Principal Investigator, Barbara S. Macnider, Senior Project Manager, and this author. Holly DeMaagd and Thomas Jones assisted in crew supervision. Funding for the stadium was provided by Maricopa County taxpayers and the Arizona Diamondbacks. The effort to identify, evaluate, and mitigate the impacts to historic properties was voluntary on the part of the Stadium District and was done with the full participation of the Phoenix Historic Preservation Office and the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office. Because of the extremely tight construction schedule, data recovery efforts followed immediately after the identification of archeological resources. Construction equipment often shared the site with archeologists, impatiently waiting for excavation to be concluded. The Stadium District required that the stadium be completed in time for the 1998 spring baseball season and penalties were to be paid by any contractor who delayed construction.

The location of the new stadium was the southeast corner of the original Phoenix townsite first surveyed in 1870. The structure would occupy 8 and 1/2 city blocks or some 22 acres of land. Most of the acreage had never been examined for archeological evidence of either prehistoric or historic use of the area. However, excavations had occurred nearby providing evidence that the prehistoric Hohokam had irrigated their

fields of corn via an extensive system of canals that drew water from the nearby Salt River. Because of frequent floods, Hohokam residential areas were established on the higher terraces to the north. It was therefore anticipated that the majority of the archeological discoveries would be historic, dating to the Euro-American settlement of Phoenix.

The Sponsors

Phoenix, unlike most southwestern pioneer towns, was a planned community. Earlier settlement had occurred several miles to the east in response to the needs of the military at Fort McDowell. The lush grasses that grew in abundance along the banks of the Salt River proved to be an inexpensive source of livestock feed and several enterprising men such as John Y. T. (Yours Truly) Smith, entered into contracts with the army to cut the grasses for delivery to the fort. Eventually, the economic and agricultural potential of the valley was recognized, land was cleared, and fields of grain were planted. Re-excavated and refurbished prehistoric Hohokam canals delivered water from the river. Population in the Salt River Valley grew rapidly and it soon became evident that it would be advantageous to all concerned to have an established, organized townsite. As a compromise between conflicting interests, the residents of three older settlements decided to plot a new community in an area to the west on land where no prehistoric ruins would interfere with construction activities (Mawn 1979).

Destined to become the state capital, the settlement was surveyed in 1870 by John T. Alsap and included 320 acres of unimproved desert lands. The new community was named Phoenix, re-using the ancient symbol of a new settlement rising out of the ashes of one long dead (Luckingham 1989). The sale of city lots was brisk and soon adobe businesses and homes lined the new 80-foot wide city streets. Cottonwood trees, watered by small irrigation ditches, shaded the dry and dusty roads. Phoenix was soon home to hotels, livery stables, saloons, theaters, and elegant homes. Prosperity seemed to be assured, but disastrous floods in the 1880s slowed growth. The southeast corner of the townsite was lower in elevation and suffered more devastation than the blocks to the north. Any landowner with sufficient financial resources quickly sold and moved to higher ground, leaving the flood-prone areas to the more economically disadvantaged. The area soon became a *barrio* of Mexican-American

immigrants and African Americans. Commercial interaction between neighborhood residents and Native Americans on nearby reservations was common and locally made goods were an inexpensive resource.

The neighborhood was home to economic and social minorities for many years and the location of numerous saloons, brothels, and billiard parlors. One block (infamous Block 41) became the officially designated “red light district” when the Phoenix City Council specifically set it aside “... to confine prostitutes to a certain locality within the city” (Luckingham 1994:137). In 1898, the “red-light district” was outlawed by the city, but prostitution continued unabated until well into the 1940s, sharing real estate with churches, hotels, and schools.

The initial economic development of Phoenix was impeded because it lacked access to goods and markets on the east and west coasts. The community lay between two transcontinental rail lines, necessitating that all goods be hauled by wagon from the railheads at Prescott to the north or Maricopa to the south. This was resolved in 1878 with the arrival of the Maricopa and Phoenix Railroad, whose tracks entered Phoenix from the east and passed through the townsite on Harrison Street, which bordered the southern edge of the growing community. Enterprising businessmen immediately recognized the commercial potential of the new rail line and much of the project area was transformed into a warehouse district. Citrus warehouses and packing sheds, a large tannery, and other commercial enterprises moved in. The railroad also contributed to a new look for this western town as access to less expensive cut lumber led to a more “Americanized” architecture as the old adobe structures were demolished. Lumber also had its inherent problems and devastating fires ravaged the downtown area several times before strict fire regulations were enacted.

The flooding problem was solved in 1911 with the completion of Roosevelt Dam, located in the mountains to the west of the Salt River Valley. This was the first of the federal government’s water reclamation projects and meant that Phoenix and a growing number of neighboring communities would have sufficient water for both agricultural and culinary use. As Phoenix continued to grow, increasingly wealthy warehouse owners pressured the Mexican, Chinese, and Black residents to sell their homes. These

Toys on Navajo rug recovered during demolition. Photo courtesy Arizona Diamondbacks.



minorities continued to live in mostly segregated communities in South Phoenix in and around the railroads, the warehouses, and brothels. The Frederick Douglass School for “colored children” was constructed in 1911 making educational segregation in Phoenix official. The school was located on Block 30 on the northern side of the stadium property. Black residents, angered at having to live in a community surrounded by prostitution and its associated vices, appealed to the city council to use a 1903 law forbidding that type of business to be located within 400 yards of a public building. The council was forced to act and the brothels were forced to close down or move, officially at least. Segregation remained a major part of Phoenix public education until 1953, when the Superior Court of Arizona ruled it illegal. The Douglass School had been little used after 1945 as population shifts changed the demography of the neighborhood and the school was demolished by 1947.

Commercial use of the stadium site increased dramatically throughout the mid-to-late 1900s and by the time the land was needed for the new stadium, only one original home remained in the area, a small frame structure housing one last resident, an elderly descendant of one of the first Mexican Americans to purchase land in Phoenix. This pre-1900 residence and three warehouses listed on the National Register fell to the wrecker’s ball in 1995. As part of the historic preservation effort, two walls of the Arizona Citrus Growers warehouse were preserved and became a part of the new stadium. The loading docks that once received citrus from throughout the valley for shipment throughout the nation, now receive shipments of popcorn,

peanuts, and crackerjacks for sale to thousands of avid baseball fans.

Warm Up

Several research goals were identified to guide fieldwork and artifact analysis. The sheer magnitude of the excavation had the potential to address numerous issues such as the history of soft drink manufacture in the Valley of the Sun, children’s activities in early Phoenix, minority participation in the overall Phoenix economy, prostitution in early Phoenix, the benefits of municipal sewage systems, and meat procurement and distribution in a pioneering settlement. Because of budget constraints, research goals were restricted to those related to the cultural history of this portion of the old townsite. Research questions included:

- What changes occurred due to the transition of the area from mainstream Euro-American settlement to minority dominance and then in turn to a commercial center?
- Was the use of a portion of the area as the official “red-light district” discernible in the archeological record?
- Could the general health of the residents be evaluated by their use of proprietary and prescription drugs and by analysis of privy soils to determine the presence of parasites?
- What were the social and economic effects of the coming of the railroad and the resultant transition of the area from residential to commercial use?

In order to provide a substantive background for excavation, extensive documentary research preceded fieldwork. A thorough architectural study of the area to be impacted by stadium construction was prepared by Strand and Fraser (1996), while a second study discussed the Arizona citrus industry and its relationship to the citrus warehouses that were demolished to make room for the stadium (Strand and Fraser 1995). In addition, all Phoenix City Directories were consulted and organized by both address and year. Copies of all pertinent Sanborn Insurance maps were obtained and coordinated with information from the city directories. Research also included consultation with representatives of the African-American community and a visit to the nearby museum of Phoenix Black History. This museum is housed in nearby Carver High School, buildings that once housed a segregated high school. A few individuals associated with the museum were willing to share their experiences

while growing up in the project area. All information included in reports from earlier archeological investigations on nearby blocks was also examined. By compiling this archival information, target areas on each block were identified and backhoe trenching was directed toward known potential historical resources.

Let the Game Begin

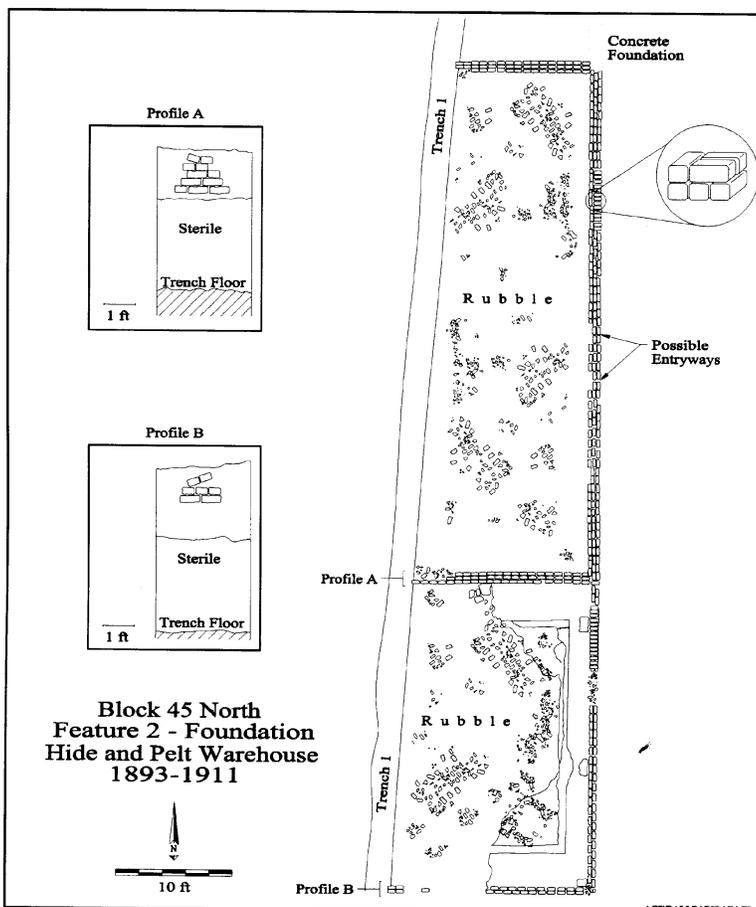
Guided by Sanborn Insurance maps, excavation began in August 1995 during one of Arizona's hottest summers. Temperatures regularly climbed to 115 degrees, intensified by the surrounding skyscrapers and blacktop parking lots. As is typical of many urban archeology projects, the excavation schedule was governed by the demolition and construction schedule for the stadium. Coordination was the key to the completion of our work, and with large penalties to be paid for delay, most construction contractors were more than willing to cooperate. Because of the extensive demolition required, it was necessary to deal with each half block as it was purchased and cleared of debris. It was common to be digging investigative trenches on one part of the block while demolition crews were removing standing structures on another part.

Occupational Health and Safety Act (OSHA) regulations also played a large part in the excavation methodology and schedule. All backhoe trenches were limited to a depth of five feet. However, most features, especially wells and privies, extended far beyond this depth. It was therefore necessary to "step back" all excavations to prevent exceeding the maximum depth allowable. This required additional backhoe time and made it impossible to produce complete profile maps of these features or a thorough study of their depositional histories. In the case of 11 wells, which averaged 12-13 feet in depth, even the backhoe could not move enough dirt to satisfy OSHA regulations and these features were completed by a mechanical "grab sample." Additional safety guidelines required that all personnel wear long pants and hard hats when heavy equipment was on site. And this in the Arizona summer sunshine! Needless to say, the crew consumed gallons of cold water and Gatorade and the ice cream vendor was the favorite daily visitor.

It's a Home Run!

By the time the 13-month investigation was completed, 129 backhoe trenches had been excavated, opening up 766,601 square feet or 1.3% of the 22.2-acre site. No trenching was undertaken within the existing streets as they were needed by construction equipment. In total, 379 features were recorded throughout the site of which 180 were excavated. The remainder were profiled and mapped. Thirty-seven features were prehistoric, most of which were canal segments. Privies accounted for 61 of the historic features, 11 were wells, and 114 were related to trash disposal activities. The remainder were structural (basements, foundations, walls, etc.). Because of time and budget constraints, excavation generally was done in one-foot levels with all artifact-bearing soils screened through 1/4-inch mesh. Soil and pollen samples were collected from most undisturbed levels. All prehistoric artifacts were collected, while Euro-American items were cursorily examined in the field by a historical archeologist. This prevented time being spent collecting items from modern trash deposits. In total, 7,123 bags of artifacts and soil samples were collected.

Artifacts from those features with integrity of provenience were subsequently analyzed. Approximately 100,000 individual items were identified. Representative soil and pollen samples and a large percentage of the faunal bone collection were also analyzed. In addition, 11 soil





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samples were sent to Karl Reinhard, a specialist in archaeoparasitology, for a parasite study; only one parasite egg was found. Apparently, the Arizona heat and sun had salutary effects on parasite-borne diseases. Archaeomagnetic dating was conducted on seven samples, four from burned features and three from canal sediments. The resultant dates suggested two periods of prehistoric occupation: A.D. 600-750 and A.D. 850-925.

All analyzed artifacts were dated when possible and assigned to one of 22 contexts relating to human activities. The collection from each feature was then cross-checked with the demographic history of the closest address and the families or tenants known to have lived there. All data recovered from each feature, including artifacts, were included in the appendices of the final report for use by anyone wishing to conduct further associative studies (Jackman, et.al. 1999).

The information compiled during the ballpark excavations has provided tantalizing results in relation to our suggested research questions. It would appear that residents were free of parasite-born diseases and that the inhabitants of the "red-light district" lived as well as, if not better than, their neighbors. Finally, all artifacts and field records have been curated with the Phoenix Museum of History, where they are being used for interpretative displays on Phoenix history, as research data for museum interns, and as educational aids for teaching school age children about archeological methods. Some of the unanalyzed

faunal bone was sent to the University of Arizona where it is being used in a type-collection and to train students of faunal analysis. The archeological data from the Bank One Ballpark continues to educate and fascinate Phoenix's residents.

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VOLUME 23 • NO. 10
Cultural Resources
Washington, DC