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September 2007 Newsletter

The Archaeology of the Allensworth Hotel: Negotiating the System in Jim Crow America

By Beatrice R. Cox*

Allensworth, California stands as an example of a larger social and economic movement to build Black town-sites, a movement that took place across the United States following the Civil War. Cultural racism enabled the existence of these intentional communities at a time when the constitutional rights of African Americans had been granted and acknowledged by the courts through the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments to the Constitution. At the height of the “Jim Crow” era, between 1890 and 1910, Southern states passed the bulk of discriminatory laws that segregated the races and reinforced the white supremacist attitudes engulfing many segments of the country (Katz 1996:249). It was also the second period of intense migration out of the South to the Western states (King 2003:107-113; Ramsey 1977:36; Rose 1965:363). In California, Jim Crow laws that segregated schools and public accommodations, prohibited interracial marriages, and restricted voting rights were in place by 1908, when Allensworth was founded.

By positioning the development of the African American town of Allensworth within the political and social structure of the United States during the Jim Crow era, a distinctive relationship emerges. Lieutenant Colonel Allen Allensworth, an exslave from Kentucky, founded Allensworth, California on the foundation of two distinct nationalist political ideologies:

social accommodation and cultural pluralism. These positions manifested out of opposition to racial oppression as buffers and as viable solutions to combating discrimination. In providing the sociopolitical context for this type of settlement, the material culture study of the Allensworth Hotel introduces a new inquiry for interpretation of qualitative data that informs African American sites. An analysis of the artifacts excavated from the hotel site suggests that African American political movements, beset with legalized discrimination, influenced the actions of the Allensworth pioneers negotiating the constructs of the Jim Crow era.



History and Heritage of Allensworth

The contemporary story of Allensworth, California begins in 1968, on the eve of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination. Cornelius Edward Pope, a resident of Allensworth and an employee of the California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), initiated interest in Allensworth as a historical district to help perpetuate the momentum of the 1960s Civil Rights

Movement and to honor the legacy of its slain leader (Ramsey 1977:189). In 1971, the State Park and Recreation Commission concluded, “the California State Park System is deficient in historical preservation and interpretative programs giving recognition to the role played by Black citizens in the development of California” (DPR 1971:x, 1976:5). The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), in the same report, acknowledged the development of the Park as a positive and significant shift for the state in answer to “nonharmonious attitudes in our social environment,”

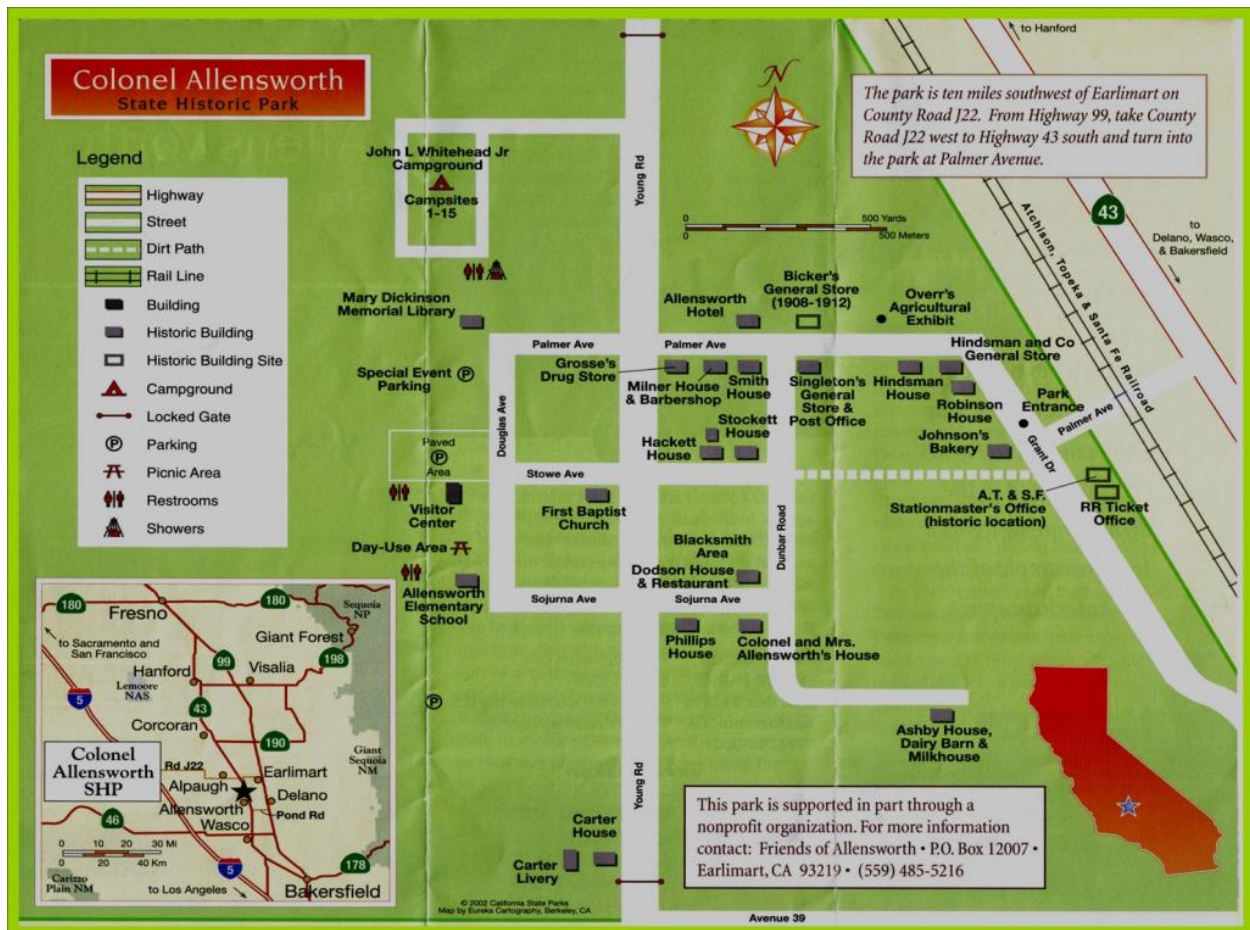


Figure 1: Allensworth brochure vicinity map (DPR 2003).

creating “an unparalleled education tool for California in its attack on social problems” (1971:21). DPR consulted with historical societies of San Francisco, Oakland, and Los Angeles, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and historians of

African American history to locate and confirm the parameters of a representative site. The consensus was that “Allensworth was one of the best examples of the contribution Blacks made in the development of California” (DPR 1976:5). Allensworth was classified as a State Historic Park in 1974 (Ramsey 1977:190). Downtown Allensworth was reconstructed between 1974 and 2004, on a 240-acre section of the 320-acre historically designated town site. Archaeological investigations of the Allensworth Hotel site began in 1988. The hotel was part of the DPR’s General Development Plan in 1976 to restore and reconstruct 30 historic buildings (DPR 1976:23), of which 23 have been restored to date.

At the turn of the twentieth century, W. E. B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington were the catalysts to a nationalist platform, contributing to a plethora of cultural approaches for negotiating a color-biased society (Ramsey 1977:79-80; Taylor 1998:241-242). The founding of Allensworth is an example of the impact these leaders had in the building of “race colonies,” a name given to independent intentional communities comprised of Black members” (Ramsey 1977:29). Washington was a firm supporter of Black town building at the height of the Jim Crow era. He believed that if Blacks accepted the separate but equal laws and developed economic standing, then favorable sentiment by white’s would be gained (Katz 1996:248; McBroom 2001:153; Meier 1969:iii). DuBois, on the other hand, as co-founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), championed the struggle for civil rights and stood against segregated schools. He believed that persistent agitation, political action, and academic education would be the means to ending Black oppression (Meier 1969:iii).

The Allensworth Hotel was part of a broader plan by the town founders to build a prosperous community for both investors and pioneers. The California Colony and Home Promoting Association founded by the Allensworth team and three other corporations invested in

Allensworth. All collaborated to promote the town by publishing newspaper articles in the white and Black community publications (Ramsey 1977:49-55). Colonel Allensworth and his constituents consistently reinforced what was written into the Articles of Incorporation, in June 1908, that the settlement at Allensworth would aid by example “in making sentiment favorable to the race” (Ramsey 1977:16) and “favorable to intellectual and industrial liberty” (Burton 1995:35).

The motivations of the Allensworth pioneers were as diverse as their individual encounters with racism and their positions in life (Hackett n.d.; Durel 1976). Some wanted to live with people of their own race for security and others saw “opportunity to control their own destiny” (Carney 1998:151). Living in Allensworth, uninhibited by daily encounters with discriminatory laws, allowed the citizenry the autonomy and opportunity to flourish. In isolation, the community exercised self-government, self-education, and self-employment, and shared common principles by which to live. Relocating to Allensworth was a commitment in itself by the townspeople to the belief and practice of political ideals influenced by Washington and DuBois who encouraged social accommodation and cultural pluralism. The community quickly defied Jim Crow stereotypes, becoming the civic model of a viable American community within six years.

In 1908, Colonel Allensworth, Professor William Alexander Payne, John W. Palmer, a retired miner from Nevada, Dr. William H. Peck, a minister of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Los Angeles, and Harvey Mitchell, a real estate specialist from Los Angeles, secured 4,000 acres of land with a platted 80-acre town site. Three white-owned companies are listed on the subdivision map: a Los Angeles firm called the Pacific Farming Company, the Los Angeles Purchasing Company, and the Central Land Company out of San Francisco, each holding title to

a portion of the land within the tract (Ramsey 1977:51). Allensworth's California Colony and Home Promoting Association "contracted with the companies for some unrecorded amount of money to secure African American settlers" and to reserve the outlying land for other potential African American purchasers (Hamilton 1991:140).

The Pacific Farming Company was the most visible in the historical records. The colony's single promotional news publication, the *Sentiment Maker*, dated May 15, 1912, gives credit to the Pacific Farming Company for making it possible to secure the acreage advertised as fertile land for agricultural and animal husbandry. However, the site straddled the Atchison Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad 78 miles west of Fresno, on infertile acreage, was landlocked, in a Swamp Zone, with pockets of alkali sink, and situated on the dry Tulare Lake basin (Ramsey 1977:50-52). The California Colony and Home Promoting Association assisted the Pacific Farming Company in promoting the establishment of the town (Ramsey 1977:14-16; Hamilton 1991:138). Published in *The Sentiment Maker* (1912) were the accomplishments of the current residents and the future goals for expansion of the town. An article appeared in the August 7, 1908 issue of the Tulare County daily newspaper, the *Daily Tulare Register*, and in other white publications such as the *Delano Record* and the *Visalia Daily Times* announcing the new town. Black weekly newspapers of the day, the *Los Angeles New Age* (January 1912), the *California Eagle* (1914), the *Western Reserve*, the *Oakland Sunshine* carried promotional articles (Ramsey 1977:78). Former Allensworth Hotel resident Joe Durel remembers his good friend Mr. Woods being approached by his own grandson, Journee White, and two white men promoting Allensworth in New Orleans. Journee White was a professional booster from Los Angeles traveling around the country promoting Allensworth, as did Colonel Allensworth and William Payne (Ramsey 1977:77). Durel explains, "They went around the country to ballyhoo the sale of

this land through Colonel Allensworth” (Durel 1976). Mr. Woods, his wife Elvia, son Freddy, and Joe Durel moved to Allensworth in 1910 for 10 years. The Woods family managed the hotel from 1916 to 1917.

Promotions in other parts of the country were successful based on the “geographical origins of the Black purchasers” (Hamilton 1991:140). The 1910, 1920, and 1930 United States Census reports list Allensworth residents from Canada, Alabama, Colorado, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Washington D.C., West Virginia, and Los Angeles, Alameda, and Oakland, California.

By 1914 Allensworth boasted two churches, a drugstore and infirmary, a hotel, post office, library, three general stores, and a restaurant, livery stable, blacksmith shop, barbershop and an elementary school. There were social clubs and a fire protection plan implemented by the women of Allensworth. The Santa Fe Railroad line ran through the town stopping at its Salido Depot, making Allensworth a transfer point, where grain and cattle merchants provided a steady stream of business for the town’s local stores and the hotel. At its peak, 1908 between 1918, Allensworth had a population of about 300 citizens.

The economic demise of Allensworth is attributed to several factors. Water struggles and a court battle with the Pacific Farming Company achieved minimal results even with a signed contractual agreement for a supply of water equal to the growth of the town. The Santa Fe Railroad spurred a line to Alpaugh, six miles north, essentially removing Allensworth’s economic base. The grain warehouse from which all goods were shipped was dismantled and moved to Alpaugh. Unfortunately, Colonel Allensworth died in 1914, killed by a motorcyclist in Monrovia. Assembly Bill 299, spearheaded by Professor William Payne and Oscar Overr to

establish the Allensworth Polytechnic Institute was defeated in 1915 by State legislators and the Los Angeles African American electorate. There was hope that if this bill passed it would secure the return of the needed economic base (Ramsey 1977:59-67).



Figure 2: Allensworth Hotel circa 1911.

The Allensworth Hotel

The Allensworth Hotel opened for business in 1910. Elizabeth Dougherty, the absentee builder and owner of the Allensworth Hotel, employed five managing families between 1910 and 1927. There is no evidence that Mrs. Dougherty ever saw the hotel. She died in 1937 at the age of 81 in Oakland. Her obituary in the *Oakland Tribune* stated that she was “possibly one of the wealthiest colored women in the State” and that she was “listed as owner of outstanding business real estate here and in other States” (1937: C-7). Dougherty purchased Lots 23 and 24 in Block 28 in July of 1910. The hotel property deed stipulated that there should be no sales or storage of

any “spirituous or intoxicating liquors of any kind whatsoever.” In addition “no gambling, prostitution or prize fighting” should be practiced “on any part of said land” or it would revert to the grantor (Deeds, Tulare County Records, Book 177:136-138).

The history of the hotel management capsulizes the lives of the people intimately connected to the hotel. There were six managers between 1910 and 1927. The oral history interviews recalled daily events and routines that, when paired with the archaeological investigations, reveals the connections between freedom of choice and self-sufficiency within the colony that characterized the philosophies of DuBois and Washington. As an example of economic industry, Nannie Coleman managed the hotel between 1917 and 1922 after her husband James (Ned) Coleman died in January 31, 1916. Previously, the couple owned property about a mile and a half south of downtown Allensworth where Mrs. Coleman sold sacks of coal and coal oil. Joe Durrell recalls, “Nannie sold coal oil for a long time and was pretty good at it” (Ramsey 1976a:14). She used to employ the youth in town to make deliveries. As a young boy Henry Singleton delivered to the Smith house, across the street from the hotel and use to teased their young daughter Halatha by chanting, “I’m the coal oil man and you gonna marry me!” Common fuels used in household stoves were coal, coal oil, greasewood, cow chips, and sagebrush.

Room and board cost 75 cents a night at the Allensworth hotel. The railroad and highway adjacent to the town ran north-south through Tulare County. The restaurant, open to the community, served home-cooked meals with ingredients from the local farmers and hunters. Most of the residents had chicken and pig yards, as did the hotel. Several church delegations traveled to Allensworth, staying at the hotel, gathering for breakfast, and being entertained by the hotel waiter, Toy Madison. Many remember him as an energetic young man with a brilliant

mind. “He use to come in with a great big tray full of food held high, tap danced like Bojangles Robinson, and no soup or no coffee would spill” (Singleton 1976). The dining hall doubled as a recreation center where regular Saturday night dances and music events were commonly held. Lester Williams, known in West coast jazz circles, played for the children’s dances at the hotel when he came to visit his relatives at Allensworth. The hotel also had a player piano that could be played for three cents a tune. Allensworth attracted Santa Fe railroad transient travelers and workers who supported many businesses, including the hotel (Ramsey 1978:163). It is not known if there was a hotel register, but one can only assume that when overnight visitors came to town, the hotel was a pleasant and entertaining option.

While the racially segregated American military was focused on World War 1, at home 31 race riots occurred between 1917 and 1922, in South Carolina, Washington, D.C., Arkansas, Illinois, Texas, Pennsylvania, and Oklahoma. Twenty-six riots occurred in the seven months between April and October of 1919, known as the “Red Summer.” The NAACP led a march in Manhattan, New York protesting the injustices of the U.S. democracy. The same period saw the rise of Marcus Garvey who promoted Black pride and nationalism. There was an explosion of creativity in the African American community that marked the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s and in 1922, the United States Senate killed an anti-lynching bill. Between 1917 and 1922, three hundred and thirty-five African Americans were known to have been lynched.

The hotel underwent structural changes between 1928 and 1938, when it was used as a private residence for a number of individual families. Jack C. Phillips, a white farmer, bought the parcel willed to Dougherty’s relative, Howard Desky, in 1938, and contracted to move the hotel to his property to use as a bunkhouse for his farm workers. The Phillips family retained

the property until acquisition by the DPR in 1974 (Deeds, Tulare County Records, Book 824:449; Book 825:247; Book 1558:22).

The Archaeology

While the field of archaeology is rich with information on the African diaspora, predating the Jim Crow era, investigations on African American town building are limited to Todd R. Guenther's thesis, *At Home On The Range: Black Settlement in Rural Wyoming* (1988) and forthcoming archaeological studies of Rosewood, Florida (Tennet 2006), New Philadelphia, Illinois (Shackel 2006), Nicodemus, Kansas (NPS 2006), Blackdom, New Mexico (Price 2003:79), and Mound Bayou, Mississippi (Young and Crowe 1998). Historical research of California suggests that there were at least 15 "boom and bust" Black towns in California between 1850 and 1910 (King 2003; Organ 1995; Ramsey 1977; Taylor 1998; Turner 1998). Over two hundred known towns were founded across the United States between 1865 and 1953 (King 2003).

In the past, Blackdom, New Mexico; Mound Bayou, Mississippi; New Philadelphia, Illinois; Nicodemus, Kansas; and Boley and Tatums, Oklahoma (Hamilton 1991:24,110) had hotels or "hotel-like" establishments. Most were owned, operated, and patronized by African Americans during the Jim Crow era and designated for "Coloreds Only." At least 13 hotels were established in San Diego's historic Gaslamp Quarter including the Douglas Hotel, which was established in 1924 (Carrico and Jordan 2004).

Many such accommodations sprang up across America during this period and in some instances providing separate accommodations for use by white patrons (Crockett 1979:74). The White House Hotel was excavated in 1980 to 1982 during the archaeological exploration of

Buxton, Iowa, a racially integrated corporate mining town in 1980-1982 (Gradwohl and Osborn 1984) and perhaps stands alone in the category of archaeological investigations of Black-owned hotels during the Jim Crow era.

In 2005 and 2006, the author, reexamined the Allensworth Hotel artifacts at the DPR's Archaeological Collections Unit. The artifacts were transferred to the Archaeological Studies Center at Sonoma State University in 2006-2007 for further study (Table 1). Six units were excavated: two 6 ft. by 6 ft., one 5 ft. by 4 ft., one 4.5 ft. by 4 ft., one 3 ft. by 4 ft., and one 2 ft. by 3 ft. unit using arbitrary levels. Four features were identified producing over one thousand artifacts.

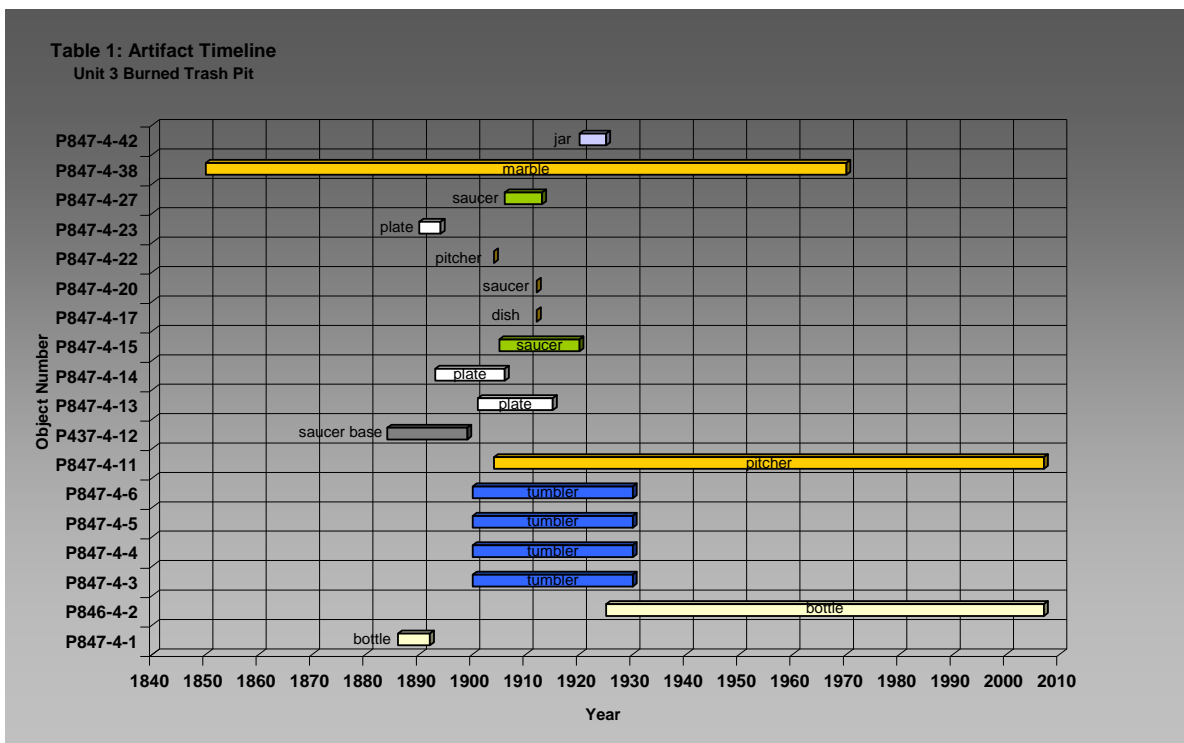


Table 1. Artifact timeline.

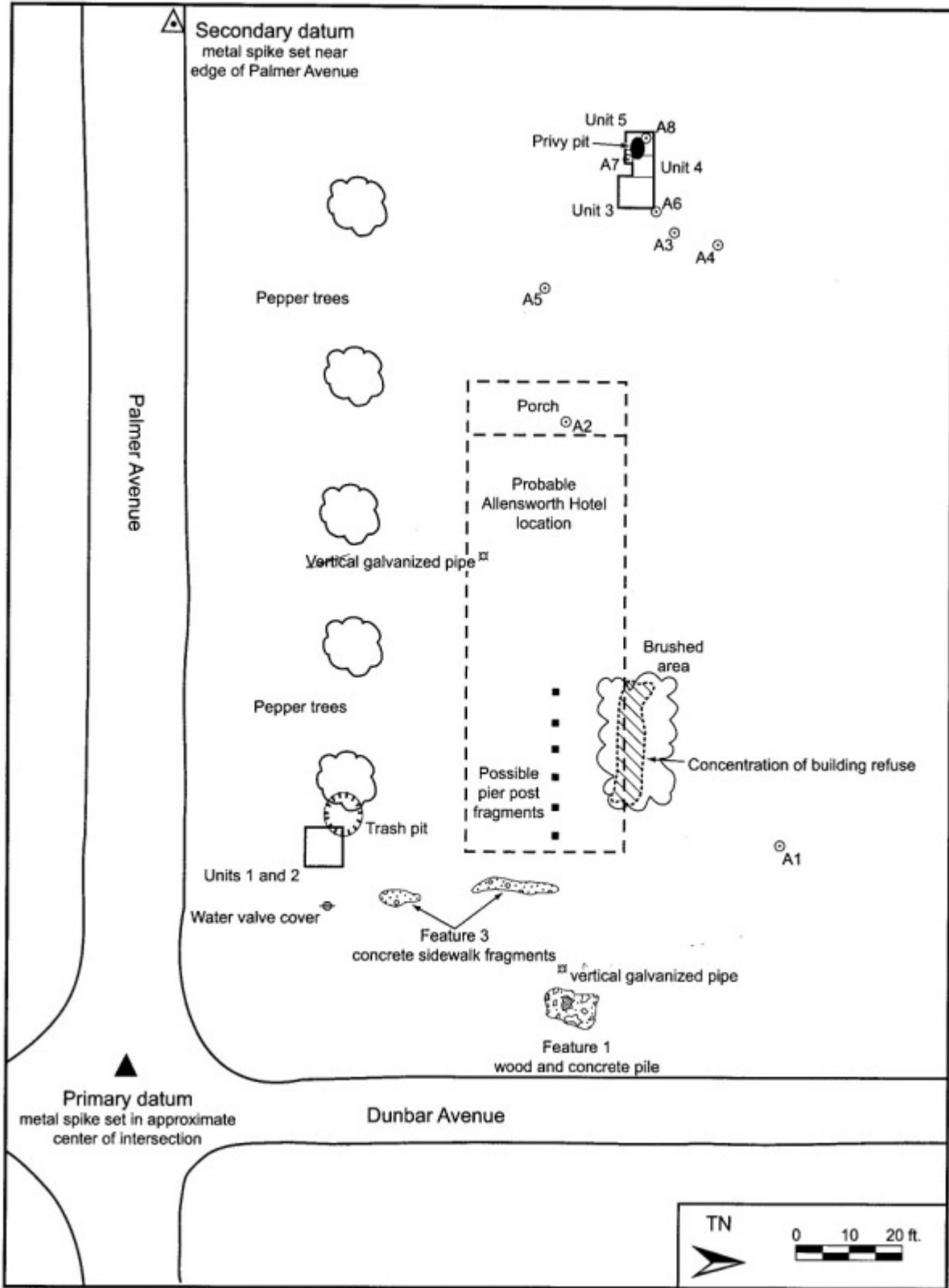


Figure 3. Hotel site map.

To establish the approximate location and dimensions of the building site, archaeologists used historic photographs and oral history interviews with former town residents. This established that the front façade of the hotel faced east towards the railroad. Interviews also revealed that the lot contained a well and water hydrant, a mechanics shop, and a barn/shelter for hogs and chickens. Excavations were focused on site validation, determination of content, and establishing the extent of the site. The six units excavated exposed four features: Feature 1, a rubble deposit/pipe, and possible well feature; Feature 2, a trash pit; Feature 3, a concrete sidewalk, and Features 4, 4SW, and 5, the privy pit.

Feature 1, the rubble deposit, consisted of wood and concrete surrounding a metal standpipe and a redwood post remnant. Shoveling exposed what may have been one of four community wells, corroborated by oral history accounts. The small deposit of remains recovered from around the standpipe also included glass, earthenware, leather, rubber, and metal artifacts.

Feature 2, the trash pit, involved excavating Unit 1 and Unit 2 in an effort to relocate the brick feature observed while trench monitoring in 1985 on the hotel lot. A large concentration of rusted metal, glass bottle and jar fragments, and one red brick were found. Vaseline jars (1908) and the sad iron (1906) had been deposited into the lower fill of the trash pit sometime after 1910, when the hotel opened. The upper fill artifacts date from about 1917 to 1964. The location of Feature 2 is indicative of use from 1927 to 1938-plus, when the hotel was a private residence and even after the hotel was removed from the site.

Feature 3, large chunks of concrete sidewalk slabs, are the remains of the walkway that was located in front of the hotel. This feature, which is present in the 1910 photograph of the hotel, helped determine the eastern location of the building site.

Units 3, 4, 4SW, and 5 all in part comprised Feature 4, the privy pit. The unlined 4-foot-deep privy yielded a variety of whiteware used in food service and glassware for preserving food. The date range of the artifacts in the units falls between 1890 and 1930. There are a number of cross mends associated with these units that could be attributed to bioturbation (Hines 1988). Fragments of the recovered porcelain water pitcher (p 847-4-11), made by Maddocks Lamberton Works of New Jersey (1904-1929), were found in units 3, 4, 4SW, and 5.



Figure 4: Maddocks Lambert water pitcher (1904-1929).

Conclusion

People seeking equality in life settled in Allensworth. The idea was to create a viable community that would gain favorable sentiment at a time when the Jim Crow system of laws suppressed any proliferation of African American society into mainstream America.

Allensworth was built on the premise of prominent Black leaders of the day who proposed educational, economic, and political options for negotiating racism. The archaeological record

of the Allensworth Hotel evidences representations of a strategic plan implemented by the pioneers of Allensworth to combat racism.

The Maddocks Lamberton water pitcher is one example of fragmented porcelain china excavated from the site. The pieces represent the ideal and the intent to demonstrate equal standings with white America. The artifactual record resembles that which could be common for turn of the century white middle class households. A comparison of foodways in white owned hotel establishments shows different subsistence strategies however, as Singleton and Bograd point out, “It may indicate that a particular site is an African-American site, but not what it was to be black at that site” (1995:22). No artifact assemblage for a Black owned and operated hotel was found for comparison.

This line of study enabled research of the ways in which Allensworth, as an intentional community, served as an effective cultural strategy for negotiating racism. This study draws upon archaeological explorations of African American life in the context of race, identity, and consumerism parallel to the history of American polity during the Jim Crow era. This project contributes to the interpretive history of Allensworth in the context of the broader history of the African American experience in the United States and particularly in California.

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