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Archaeology, History & A Hoag House Mystery

By MARY and ADRIAN PRAETZELLIS

Historical archaeologists like to boast that while the written record may be biased in favor of affluent and important persons and skewed to create a history not reflecting actual conditions, the archaeological record is unbiased and untainted by human intervention. For example, many people are self-conscious about information they give to record keepers and may misreport, for one reason or another, their ages and other facts, but few people seriously consider concealing the contents of their discarded garbage. So while Aunt Nellie may have been an avowed teetotaler, active in support of Prohibition, her privy out back might be filled with discarded liquor bottles. No one might ever know Nellie's secret unless some crafty archaeologist dug and analyzed the privy, its contents, and its history. Smugglers are another group whose covert activities can be spotted by archaeologists hundreds of years after they have occurred.

In January 1984, while the Hoag House was still at its original location - up on

piers and ready to be moved - Adrian Praetzellis, at the request of architect Dan Peterson, excavated a trash-filled pit beneath the structure. For a while, it looked as if we had caught Obediah Hoag in one of these contradictions between what historical archaeologists call observed behavior - Hoag as described by his contemporaries - and preserved behavior - Hoag as reflected by his trash. This article will present and resolve that apparent contradiction and, in the process, recount a good deal of Santa Rosa's history.

Many years after the rest of the neighborhood had been "renewed," the Hoag House persisted as a silent reminder of the frontier town of Santa Rosa. This quaint cottage, with its ivy-covered walls and distinctive sloping roof, looked almost as incongruous across from the new Sears store - massive and angular in its dimensions - as it does now seated upon blocks awaiting renovation in the old city corporation yard on Donahue Street.

The oldest wooden residence in Santa Rosa, the Hoag House is also the last home remaining from the city's first residential neighborhood laid out in 1853 by the town's founding fathers. Julio Carrillo owned the only house in town when it was first surveyed; it was located on a 2nd Street site now occupied by a city parking lot, but slated shortly for development. Achilles Richardson had a small store nearby, south of 1st Street near Santa Rosa Creek, just outside the city limits.

The new town began to fill with homes and businesses and, in September of 1854, it displaced the City of Sonoma as the county seat. Two months later, Julio Carrillo sold the parcel of land that was later occupied by the Hoag House to John Ingram for \$168. This parcel was just outside the city limits, fronting 1137 feet on 1st Street and bounded by Santa Rosa Creek and the property of Mr. Richardson, the storekeeper. John Ingram was one of the first settlers in Santa Rosa Township and another of Santa Rosa's founders. Arriving in the area by 1851, he worked at farming and, beginning in 1854, practiced as a building contractor in Santa Rosa. John Ingram helped in the original town survey and, according to his obituary, constructed "most of the first houses in Santa Rosa."

It is probable that the Hoag House was built by John Ingram between 1854 and 1857 when he sold the easternmost 431 feet of his lot - including the Hoag House site - to William Crowell for \$1000. William Crowell served as County Clerk in 1857 and 1858, and it is possible that he was a lawyer by profession. He listed no occupation on the 1860 census, but his neighbors, residing within walking distance of the first county Court House on 4th Street between Mendocino and D, were nearly all either county employees or lawyers. Crowell, a native of Connecticut, had a wife and two young children at this time.

In 1863 Crowell sold his 1st Street lot to C. J. Hannath, a San Francisco based real-estate speculator, who already owned the former Richardson property to the east. In 1870 Hannath sold the property to attorneys John Brown and General Whallon. Some unrecorded transfer of property may have occurred before this date, however, for an 1867 map shows "Gen Whalon" as the parcel's owner. Whallon eventually purchased a vineyard outside of Sonoma and probably never lived on 1st Street. John Brown came to Santa Rosa in 1856, married Whallon's daughter in 1866, and apparently lived on 4th Street by 1870; so it is unlikely that he ever lived on the property either. Brown and Whallon sold the lot to Armstead Runyon in January of 1871.

Armstead Runyon was a Forty-niner who came to California with borrowed money and ended up a very wealthy man. Runyon owned a ranch in the Sacramento Valley, and the 1st Street property was his first real estate purchase in Santa Rosa. In April of 1871, he bought a large parcel of land on B Street at 8th where, in the following year, he proceeded to build an elegant residence. By Christmas of 1872 the builders were putting the finishing touches on his house, and the family moved in shortly thereafter. Runyon was certainly very active in town business during the construction of his home; he must have lived somewhere nearby, and it is conceivable that he lived in his 1st Street property, his first local holding.

In November of 1875, A. Runyon entered into a lease-to-own agreement with O. H. Hoag regarding the lot "known as the Wm. H. Crowell" property, whereby Hoag could purchase the property if he paid Runyon

\$1150 within one year. Hoag paid half the money, but before the year was up and Hoag could make the final payment, Runyon died in a buggy accident and his property went to Probate Court. In December 1876, Hoag paid the remaining half of the purchase price and obtained legal title to the property that was to remain in his family for the next 100 years.

Obediah H. Hoag, or "Obe" as he was known to his friends, was a New Yorker by birth, coming as a young man from Poughkeepsie to Sonoma County in 1857. He and other members of his family settled in and around Bloomfield, where they farmed the land and participated in local politics. A few years after his arrival, O.H. Hoag married Lurena Cockrill, daughter of one of the first families to settle in the area. In the spring of 1853, Mr. and Mrs. Cockrill and their ten children started across the plains for California. In October of that year, they arrived in what was to become the town of Bloomfield where Mr. Cockrill built the first home, opened the the first boarding house, and obtained the first parcel of deeded land on the Blume Grant.

In 1862 O.H. Hoag ran for the State Assembly and was elected by a "flattering majority;" at the time he was the youngest member of the house. In 1865 Obe was reelected, despite the embarrassment of having his own brother as his opponent. While in the Assembly, Hoag won the gratitude of the citizens of Santa Rosa by thwarting an attempt to remove the county seat from their domain. The Sonoma Democrat described his victory as follows:

He did not jump on it with both feet. He was a good deal too bright for that. He just let it run gently along, and one day, by the exercise of a little legislative diplomacy he had the whole matter indefinitely postponed - he put it in the legislative nine hole, and there it slept the sleep of Capulets.

Perhaps due to its somewhat isolated position, the town of Bloomfield did not prosper to be the kind of place its founders had envisioned. It lacked sufficient inducements to keep an up-and-coming young lawyer and politician like Obediah Hoag among its inhabitants. Hoag was engaged in a campaign for County Recorder when he moved with his wife and

children to Santa Rosa in the latter part of 1875. His family's staying in town was possibly contingent on his winning the election, which he did. In 1878, Hoag retired from politics and resumed his legal practice until he was appointed Federal Storekeeper in 1881, an office which he held until the close of the Cleveland Administration. He then resumed his old legal business, engaged primarily as a real estate and insurance agent.

Obe was always well respected by the citizens of Santa Rosa and "in the business community was rated as a careful, conscientious and energetic business man." Politically he was a "patriotic, though liberal and consistent Democrat." To further quote the Sonoma Democrat: "He is liberal and public spirited and is never backward when called upon to contribute to the success of a public enterprise." One of the public enterprises to which Hoag contributed and which bears directly upon the subject of this article was the Anti-Chinese Movement.

In the nineteenth century, Santa Rosa, like many cities on the Pacific Coast, had a Chinatown in her midst that provided many of her citizens with a source of amusement, indignation, and fear. The population of Santa Rosa's Chinatown, situated in the center of town to the southeast of the Plaza and north of Santa Rosa Creek, fluctuated according to the seasons and the need for laborers in the outlying agricultural districts. The Chinese who resided in town year-round worked primarily as cooks, waiters, and domestic servants; as merchants and boardinghouse keepers who catered almost exclusively to their countrymen; and as laundrymen who monopolized the washing business in Santa Rosa until 1885. The Chinese provided farmers and town dwellers with a reliable, cheap, and efficient source of labor, available upon demand. For decades California labor organizations had been working to eliminate this source of competition by lobbying for laws to prevent further Chinese immigration and by organizing anti-Chinese leagues to boycott the Chinese and thus drive them out of town, and eventually, it was hoped, out of the country. (For more on the Overseas Chinese in Sonoma County, see The Journal, 1981, No. 4.)

Fueled by a local incident, the Chinese

became the focal point of intense racial propaganda in January of 1886 when Mr. and Mrs. Wickersham were murdered, allegedly by their Chinese cook, on their ranch in the mountains to the west of Healdsburg. This event received wide and sensational press coverage and provided a rallying point for an anti-Chinese movement that spread throughout the West and drove the Chinese out of numerous communities, to which they never returned. Statewide, anti-Chinese boycotts were organized in both California and Nevada. Locally, the Sonoma Democrat assailed its readers with three vivid descriptions - each different - of the victims. During the hysteria that followed few persons came forward as being pro-Chinese. In fact, as politicians strove to be the most vehemently anti-Chinese, the worst accusation was to charge a person with being secretly in league with "the Heathen." It was engaged in a public debate of this nature that we find O. H. Hoag in March of 1886.

In a letter to the editor of the Sonoma Democrat entitled "Sweet Consistency," a V. Stillwell of Bloomfield described a rousing anti-Chinese speech given in that town by O.H. Hoag, "advising us for the good of the country, the love of our families, the welfare of our citizens, and the benefit of schools and churches, to use all lawful means to rid ourselves of this black horde, these opium fiends, this leprous scourge." It seems Mr. Stillwell had been requested by the citizens of Bloomfield to report the "sequel" to Mr. Hoag's speech: the fact that Mr. Hoag owned two houses in their town - "old fire traps" - rented for six dollars a month to "these many-aliased Chinese." Hoag, according to the letter, had agreed to turn out his Chinese if a second party did likewise; the second party agreed contingent upon the stand of a third landowner. The third party was not willing, so no one discharged their Chinese, thus the title of the piece, "Sweet Consistency." Mr. Stillwell concluded his letter with the lament that his action was "lawful although painful. Written by request. Yours truly..."

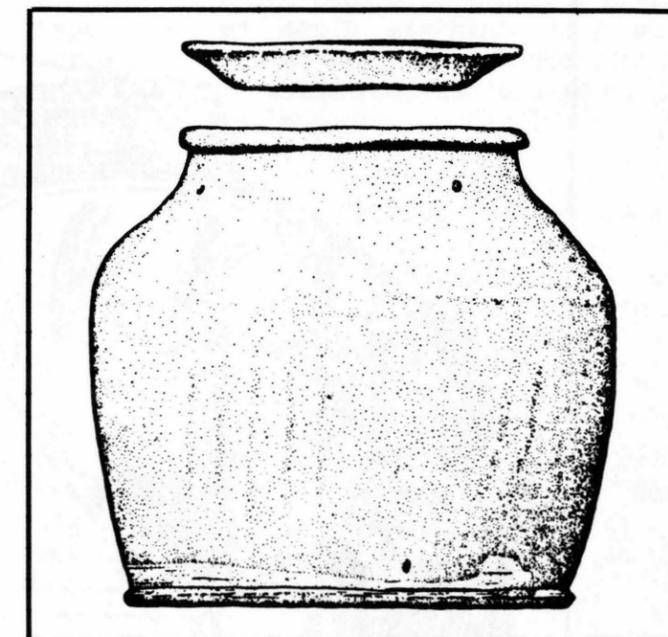
O.H. Hoag immediately took up this challenge, entitling his reply "Sweet Consistency" and signing off "Written without request. Yours, without pain..." Hoag took his leave to explain and compare his record on the Chinese question with

with Stillwell's "'aided' effusion." Hoag, it seems, owned four structures on Main Street in the "once prosperous" village of Bloomfield; structures that were valuable properties until the "advent of the 'Chinese horde.'" It was after his removal that the Chinese "took possession" of the "beautiful village," and it was Stillwell, Hoag argued, who was "one of the foremost in offering them inducements for their accommodation." Hoag apparently did rent to Chinese, but lost their patronage to Stillwell who built "more attractive palaces for their accommodation." Stillwell, Hoag charged, went so far as to discharge his old butcher and replace him with a "hog-killing Chinaman," who was so grateful that he named his only son after Stillwell. It was only recently, it seems, that Stillwell "caught the echoes of 'the Chinese must go'" and turned out his former Chinese friends. Hoag concluded that he renewed no contract with his Chinese tenants, that "For my own part, I neither employ Chinese, nor buy their goods, preferring wine to tea." The standoff between Mr. Stillwell and Mr. Hoag was typical of the political bickering of the time. Nearly all successful politicians voiced such rabid sentiments. There were, however, few segments of the economy which had not benefited from the presence of the Chinese, and many politicians found themselves in the awkward position of our two combatants - the pot calling the kettle black.

And now to the archaeology of the Hoag House site. It is Hoag's claim that he neither employed Chinese nor purchased their goods that is called into question by the artifacts found beneath his house. The trash-filled pit contained objects clearly identifiable as Euroamerican in origin and other objects always found in association with Overseas Chinese occupation.

The Overseas Chinese inhabitants of the Pacific West retained their own customs regarding nearly all aspects of life. They purchased food and household goods from Chinese merchants who imported a special line of merchandise from China suited to the needs of their customers. This line was far removed from the fine porcelain and other goods exported from China for sale to wealthy patrons in Europe and America.

The most ubiquitous type of ceramic found on nineteenth-century Overseas Chinese sites is usually called Chinese Brown Glazed Stoneware by archaeologists. This type most commonly occurs as food and liquid jars, lids, and bottles for the shipping and storage of prepared foods, liquors, and condiments. These distinctive items are easily recognized as Chinese and are part of a ceramic tradition whose design and technology persisted with little change for more than a century. In fact, a few of the forms have endured to the present and may be purchased in the specialty aisles of some supermarkets, such as G & G Market on West College Avenue in Santa Rosa.

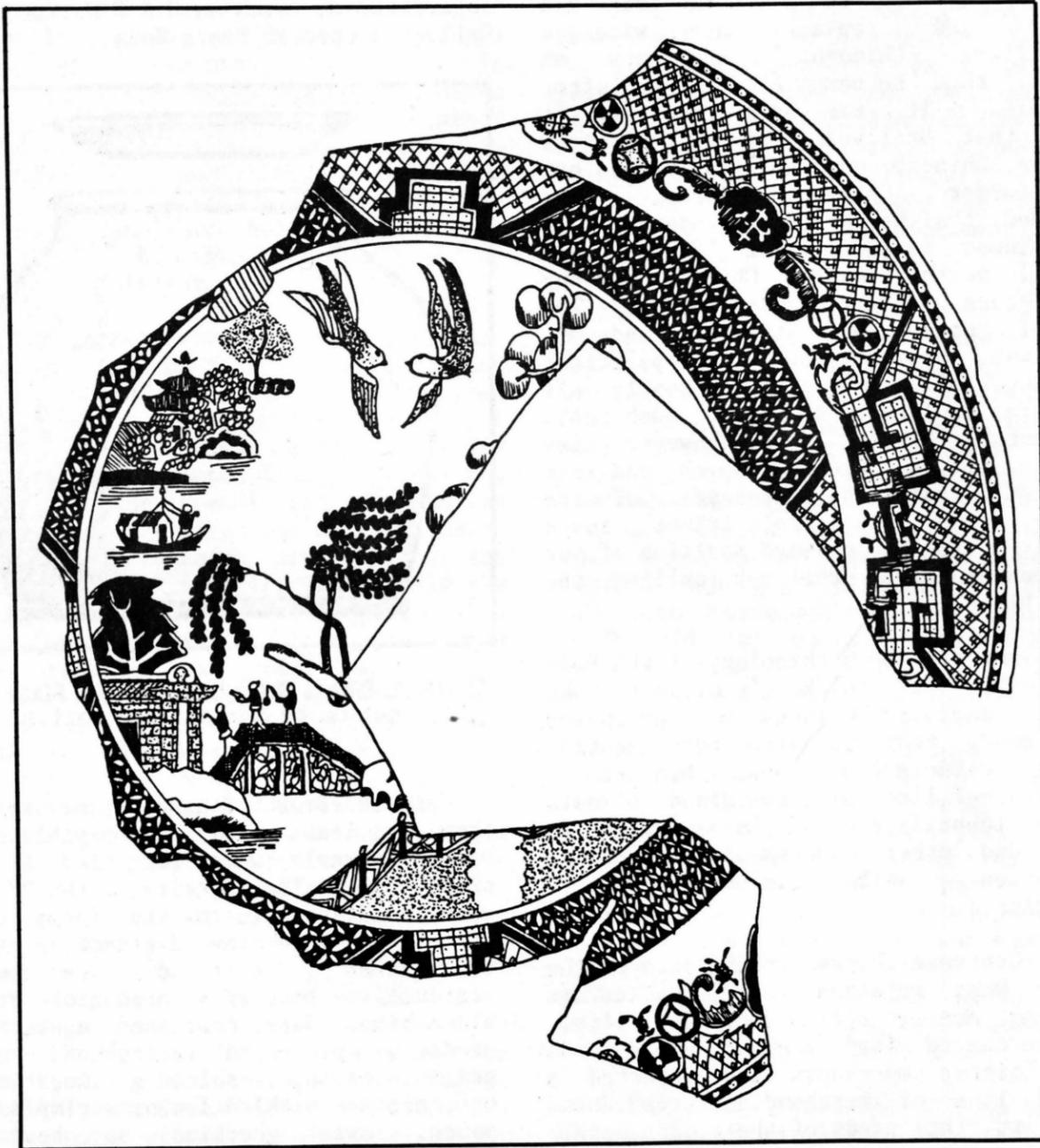


CHINESE BROWN GLAZED STONEWARE FOOD JAR.
Illustration by Adrian Praetzelis.

Chinese Brown Glazed Stoneware sherds from at least two, and possibly several more, vessels were recovered from the trash pit. The majority of the 28 sherds were nondiagnostic as to form; the two exceptions were the distinctive rim of a widemouthed jar and the equally distinctive base of a large globular jar. Widemouthed jars contained a variety of products: preserved vegetables - mustard greens, cabbage, salted garlic, radishes, or onions - pickled lemon, shrimp sauce or paste, sweet gherkins, soy bean curd, sweet rice crackers, Chinese bacon, pickled duck eggs, dried oysters, fish, abalone, seaweed, mustard, lichee nuts, peanut oil, molasses, and tea. Most of

these would have been unpalatable to the Hoags. The globular jar probably contained a large quantity of either peanut oil or soy sauce, both prime requisites of Chinese cuisine. The only other artifacts positively identified as Chinese in origin are sherds from a small porcelain bowl, with a nicely painted floral design in overglaze enamels and gilding at the rim. Again, this was not a piece of fine Canton Ware made strictly for the export market, but a less refined porcelain, exported to and used by the Overseas Chinese.

Canton, or Blue and White Ware, did provide, however, the original inspiration for designs on many of the British earthenwares found in the pit beneath the Hoag House. The most common of the designs, both in general and in this pit, was "Willow Pattern": hundreds of thousands of tons of this ever-popular pattern have been produced in various adaptations by hundreds of potters since it originated in England in 1780. The original Willow Pattern was an imitation of the color and style of Chinese Canton Ware. Within a few decades, the standard



WILLOW PATTERN SAUCER (ARCHAEOLOGICAL SPECIMEN).
Illustration by Adrian Praetzellis.

"blue plate special" was cheaply produced and widely exported by English potters. The design found on the plate and saucer sherds under discussion was introduced about 1810 and is called "Standard Willow" by ceramic historians. It contains the essential elements of the apocryphal legend depicted on the vessels and described by popular historical archaeologist Ivor Noel Hume as follows:

In this pattern the legendary lovers flee across a bridge to the gardener's cottage, pursued by a whip-wielding father; a boat awaits to carry the fugitives to the young man's island home, and when retribution catches up, the lovers are transformed into two doves that fly away to eternal happiness.

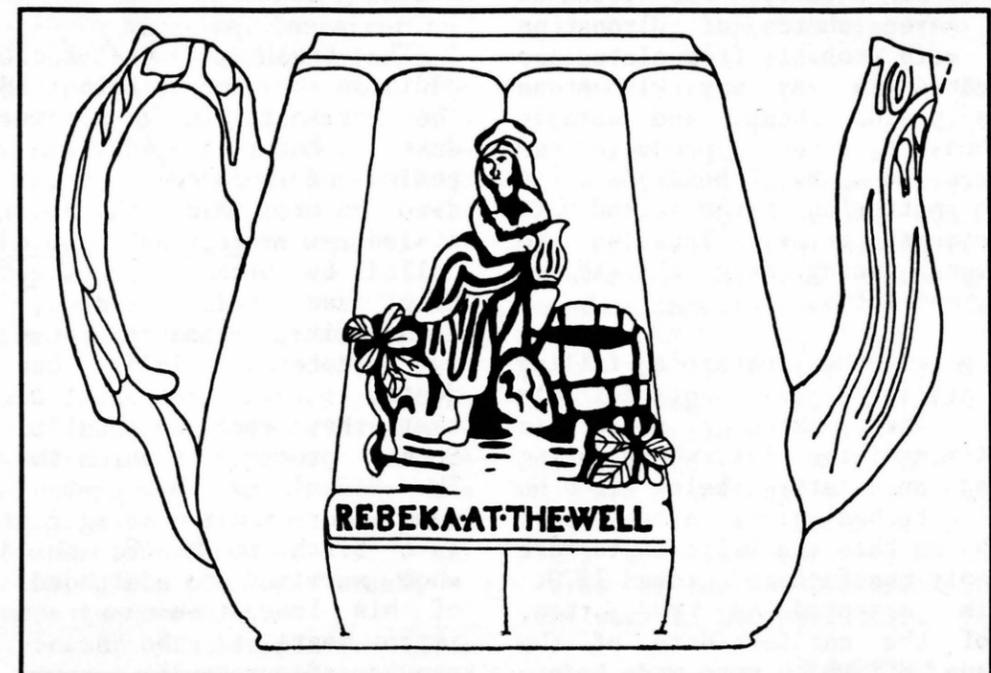
In addition to the Willow Pattern, two other floral transfer printed sherds were found; these came from a cup and a saucer with floral designs.

Another all time favorite - a "Rebeka-at-the-Well" teapot - may be represented by a Yellow Ware sherd with Rockingham-type glaze and molded decoration, apparently the portion depicting the young maiden's arm and the jug she is filling from the well. This exceedingly popular design was probably created in 1851 by Edwin Bennett of Maryland and had its prototype in a

pitcher made by Staffordshire potter Samuel Alcock. Bennett's factory produced Rebeka teapots from 1852 until it burned down in 1936. Numerous other American potters made great quantities of these teapots.

Based on the artifacts discussed thus far it would appear that a Chinese person was cooking, eating, and probably living on the premises with a Euroamerican person who also lived, cooked, and ate there. The remains of glass canning jars, a Stoneware jug or jar, and at least three Stoneware crocks - all probably American in origin - lend additional support to the idea of a racially mixed household. The finding of a toy cup, a bone button of the type used on men's clothing, and of a porcelain lattice work fruitbasket, taken in connection with the above suggest the presence of a Euroamerican family aided by a Chinese cook or domestic.

The problem of dating the deposit now becomes very important in determining whether the family in question was indeed the Hoags, who it may be recalled moved onto the property late in 1875. Glass bottles are the most reliable dating devices on most historic sites, for bottles proceed rapidly from the store to the home and then to the trash deposit. Ceramics, on the other hand, are more highly prized and are usually only thrown out when they are broken, which, in the



A "REBEKA-AT-THE-WELL" TEAPOT. (MID-19TH CENTURY).
Illustration by Adrian Praetzellis.

case of family heirlooms, could be many decades after their purchase. That is why in the present case it is so unfortunate that bottle hunters looted the trash pit under the Hoag House before it was visited by the archaeologist. They not only disturbed the feature, probably removing any whole bottles or other pieces which interested them, they also came very close to undermining the structural supports upon which the building sat while awaiting removal. Only two pieces of datable glass remained in the feature: the lip of a canning jar dating somewhere between 1858 and after the turn of the century, and a homeopathic medicine vial dating somewhere between about 1870 and the early twentieth century.

Ceramics often bear maker's marks which are extremely useful dating tools. None of the ceramics found under the Hoag House was marked in any way, thus we must rely on decorative motifs for dating. As has been mentioned, the Chinese ceramic tradition is extremely conservative and does not lend itself to this type of analysis. Although Standard Willow Pattern dates from around 1810, our pieces probably were made in the 1830s, the blue floral transfer printed pieces around 1840, and the Rebeka teapot after 1852. By 1860, the craze for transfer printed ceramics, particularly blue, had passed, and white or slightly grey vessels of molded designs were in vogue. Sherds from three vessels of this type were found in addition to seven sherds of "Ironstone China" that were probably from plates and cups undecorated in any way. Ironstone China was a plain, cheap, and durable white earthenware, mass produced and widely exported by hundreds of Staffordshire potteries in the second half of the nineteenth century. Thus, we have ceramic designs dating from the 1830s, 1840s, 1850s, and 1860s.

The dating of the feature's filling based on artifacts is not entirely conclusive. The latest piece is apparently the medicine vial, whose dating is broad and speculative, being based on the piece's technological attributes. Bottles such as this are believed to have become commonly manufactured around 1870. If this is accepted as true, then, regardless of the earlier date of the ceramics, many of which were made before the town was even settled, the feature in question would have been filled after

about 1870.

It is an artifact's "context of discovery" that designates what an archaeologist is, or is not, able to infer about a site and its occupants. In an urban area, such as Santa Rosa, the examination of artifacts scattered through a backyard, for instance, would probably lead to the "discovery" that people lived there in the nineteenth century, that they stored their food and beverages in glass and ceramic containers, and they used glass and ceramic tableware - nothing surprising or new.

Only artifacts that come from discrete contexts, such as backfilled wells or trash-pits, can be used as time capsules to tell us something about the lives of particular people at particular points in time. For example, from artifacts excavated from the Menefee well (on 7th between A and B Streets), backfilled in the mid-1870s, we can infer that the family ate ham - when they could afford it - at a table set with plain white Ironstone plates, plain and paneled cups and saucers, and serving vessels that were slightly more fashionable, being decorated with an imitation of the very popular "Fig" pattern (for more on this site, see The Journal, 1984, No. 3). It is the context of the trash-filled pit at the Hoag House that allows us to postulate the most likely solution to the "secrets of the Hoag House."

The trash pit was located under an addition to the original 1850s building. The artifacts in the pit must, therefore, date to before the addition was built, the period of that construction supplying the date before which the pit must have been filled - or terminus anti quem - as it is called by archaeologists. Obe and Lurena Hoag and their children, numbering at least five, probably moved to Santa Rosa in November of 1875. Due to Runyon's death, it was not until December of 1876 that they received legal title to the 1st Street property in which they were living. The Hoags' new house was probably too small for their growing family; Mrs. Hoag gave birth to twelve children, eight of whom survived to adulthood. On the basis of his lease-to-own agreement, Hoag made improvements to the house he was in the process of purchasing.

The 1876 Santa Rosa Tax Assessment Book

lists Runyon as the owner of the 1st Street lot as well as \$500 worth of improvements on it, and Hoag as owner of \$200 worth of improvements on the "lot on First Street belonging to A. Runyon." Thus, the documentary record, the building techniques and materials used in the addition, and the artifacts found sealed under it, combine to support a date in 1876 for the construction of the addition. The artifacts in the trash-filled pit represent what archaeologists call a "transitional" or "housecleaning" episode in the property's history, a point when a change in ownership and occupation took place. In this scenario, the artifacts themselves do not relate to the Hoag family. The Hoags were merely engaged in that chore common to new householders - they cleared out reminders of previous tenants and disposed of the "garbage" out of sight.

The mystery now becomes the identity of the family with the Chinese cook who archaeology tells us lived in the house before the Hoags. Besides the archaeology, much of which was looted by the bottle hunters, there is very little remaining evidence that can be used to address this question. An 1874 directory lists one William Lancaster, dentist, at the corner of 1st and B Streets, an address indicating Lancaster may have been renting from Runyon. In 1876, when the Hoags had taken up residence, Lancaster purchased and resided on the property to their west. At this time, Lancaster was assessed \$300 for his "stock of clocks." In 1878, Mrs. Lancaster was assessed for the property and the "stock," then she too disappears from the tax rolls in the following year. Presently, this is all we know about the family who may have lived with their Chinese domestic in what was to become the Hoag House.

It is ironic that the Hoag family, who have become so strongly identified with the house and with the history of Santa Rosa because of the Hoag House's survival, were only indirectly connected with the archaeological deposit. Archaeology has given us a glimpse of some anonymous one-time occupants through, of all unlikely sources, their discarded trash.

Mary and Adrian Praetzellis research and write about local history and archaeology from their more than one hundred year old home in Santa Rosa's historic Westend neighborhood.

Sonoma County Museum

During October the Sonoma County Museum will sponsor a special exhibit on Italians in Sonoma County, in cooperation with the North Bay Italian Cultural Foundation.

On Sunday, October 20th, the Museum will hold a special reception for the authors of Santa Rosa: A Nineteenth Century Town from 2-4 P.M. Gaye LeBaron, Dee Blackman, and Joann Mitchell will all be available to autograph their book. Copies of the book will be on sale, with a portion of the sales price benefiting the Museum. Refreshments will be served.

On Sunday, November 3rd, a special exhibit on Fountain Grove and Kanaye Nagasawa, will open with a celebration of "Japanese Culture Day." The exhibit, sponsored in cooperation with the Friends of Kagoshima, will run through November. Honored guests at the reception, set to coincide with "Culture Day" in Japan, will be a delegation from Nagasawa's hometown of Kagoshima. On display, for one day only, will be the bust of Nagasawa which the delegation will formally present to the City of Santa Rosa on Monday, November 4th. From 1-4 P.M. on Sunday there will be koto music, buyo dancing, a martial arts demonstration, origami, and ikebana - Japanese flower arranging. A very special part of the afternoon will be a Japanese tea ceremony. Refreshments will include green tea, Japanese biscuits, and sake.

On Sunday, November 17th, from 1-4 P.M., a reception will honor Elwin Millerick, master woodcarver, and open a show of his carvings. Parts of the Elwin Millerick Collection, which has been transferred to the Museum from the Coddling Museum of Natural History, will be on exhibit indefinitely.

In December the Museum will have a month long exhibit for the holidays, and the building will be decorated appropriately. A special exhibit will feature antique toys, dolls, Christmas ornaments, and decorations. The Museum will also sponsor its annual Candlelight Tours of Bed and Breakfast Inns, beginning the week of December 16th.

For further information on any event, call the Sonoma County Museum at 579-1500.