

# Peopling the Pueblo: Presidial Soldiers, Indian Servants and Foreigners in Old San Diego

by  
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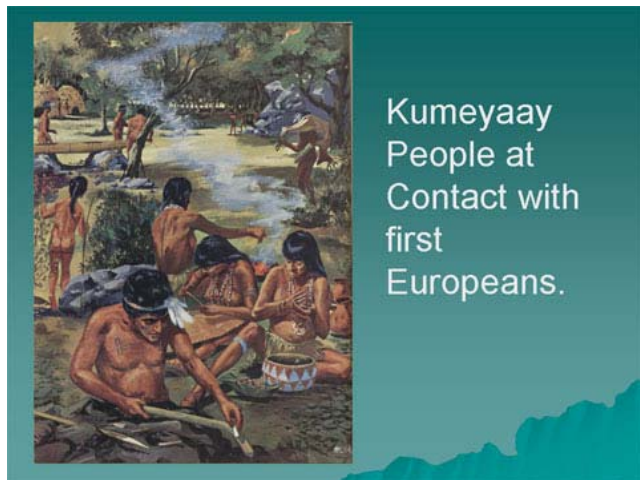
(Paper presented at the Society for Historical Archaeology Annual Conference, January 13, 2006, Sacramento CA, as part of a symposium entitled "**Mexicans, Indians and *Extranjeros* in San Diego, 1820-1850,**" organized by Glenn J. Farris. This copy includes reduced images of the PowerPoint slides that accompanied the conference presentation)

## Abstract

The history of the pueblo of San Diego during its Mexican period (1820-1846) has been largely eclipsed by the American period, mainly due to the larger number of historical resources available as well as a certain bias by the latter day historians. In this paper, an attempt is made to better understand the tripartite population that lived in early San Diego, made up of Mexican former soldiers and their families, foreign arrivals to the city and, of particular interest to our archaeological study, the little known Indian servant population. On reflection, it would appear that this latter group may well have been responsible for a considerable amount of the material culture remains found in the McCoy House excavations.

## Introduction

San Diego was initially populated by Kumeyaay Indians who greeted the first Spanish explorers in 1542 and again in 1602 and finally a third time in 1769. This last date marked the visit of Spaniards in the Portolá-Serra expedition who passed through and left a contingent of soldiers there. A mission and presidio were duly established and occupied by Franciscan priests and the Spanish soldiers. After several years it was decided to move the mission further inland, up the San Diego River six miles away from the presidio.

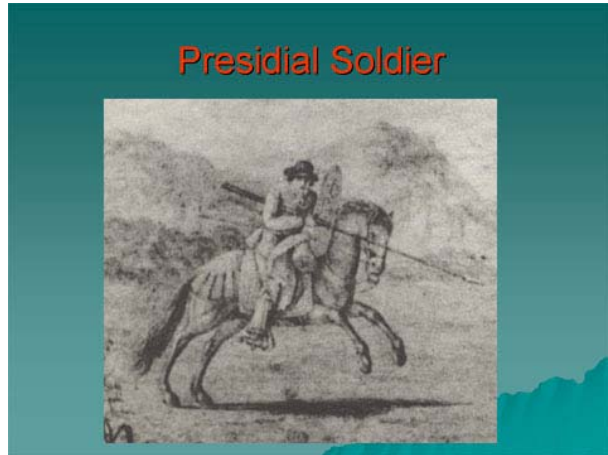


Another half century was to pass before the establishment of a community of retired soldiers in the area currently known as Old Town San Diego.

## Moving Down from the Presidio

For the first quarter century after the founding of the presidio of San Diego, the troops and their families made their residence in the presidio proper. As various old soldiers started to retire, they would have to find other places to live. The first specific mention of someone moving from the presidio to live nearby is found in a request for a land grant by Juan Pablo Grijalva (1744-1806), a retired Ensign of the San Diego Presidio, dated 1797. In it Grijalva states

that he has “established his residence on the other side of the river from the said presidio [San Diego]” (Spanish Land Grants Unclassified *Expediente* 2). It is somewhat difficult to determine where exactly Grijalva meant by “across the river from the presidio” and it is probably not in the immediate area of Old Town, however, the statement does establish that people were moving down from the area of the presidio at a rather early period.



The earliest plan map showing the details of the San Diego presidio and its environs is one dated to 1820. On the land that would later be the pueblo of San Diego, there is shown only an orchard identified as the Huerta del Comandante (Whitehead 1986:Plate XI). This was the property of Comandante Francisco María Ruiz. In the middle of the orchard is written "una palma" (a palm tree).



Judge Benjamin Hayes (1874:79) who left some of the best historical records of early San Diego stated:

Prior to 1825, with few exceptions, the white population lived within the presidio enclosure, and labored without under the protection of its guns. The only houses outside, on the bench of the present Old Town, were:

'The Fitch House', built in 1821;

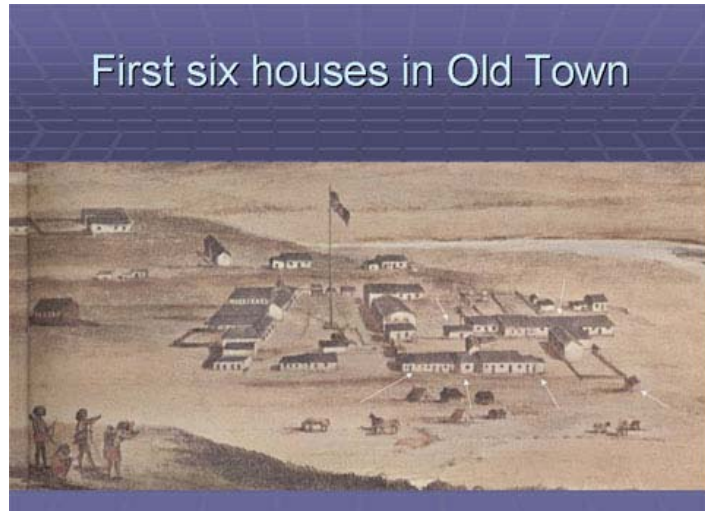
A small one belonging to Francisco Ruiz, "capitan retirado", in the "Soto Garden" (as more recently called)

Another of Doña Maria Reyes Ybañes (maternal head of the Estudillo family) which is situate at the corner of Juan and Washington Streets;

One of Rafaela Serrano (next to the Pico house on Juan Street)

And on the plaza, one belonging to the elder Juan Maria Marron.

The Pico house on Juan Street was built in 1824.



In an article published in 1877, Chauncey Hayes, the son of Benjamin Hayes, wrote:

In 1821... 'The Fitch house,' [was] the long row of buildings near the present residence of Mr. McCoy... (San Diego Union, June 15, 1877?, pg. 71).

This is interesting because it helps clarify the location of the "Fitch House."

## **Pueblo and Inhabitants of Old San Diego**

In an effort to learn more about the people who lived in the pueblo of San Diego during the Mexican period, various documents were consulted that listed individuals. For the most part, it was the men who appeared on the lists and not the women and children. One document that listed various male inhabitants of San Diego derived from elections held in San Diego on November 19, 1826 (Hayes n.d.:3). The 12 people elected (all men, of course) were listed. Typical of most of the documents of the day, it was mainly the men who were mentioned.

I found it especially valuable to examine the records of the baptisms for Mission San Diego for the years 1821-1852 (Davidson 1935-37; Griffin 1994; Census Records for San Diego n.d.). From these a list of names of children and their parents who may have lived in San Diego between 1821 and 1850 was compiled by the author. It includes 27 women, 26 men and 124 children. This list is not complete, because some children may have been baptized in other missions but

have moved to San Diego to live. Also, there were some single men and women who lived in the area but had no children (e.g., Francisco Ruiz, Apolinaria Lorenzana, etc.). Still, it does give some idea of the demographics of the pueblo of San Diego during this time.

The large size of many California families was frequently noted by visitors. It is thus important to consider the large number of children present and their probable influence on the material culture deposits found in the archaeological excavations at the McCoy House site.

## Residents of Block 408

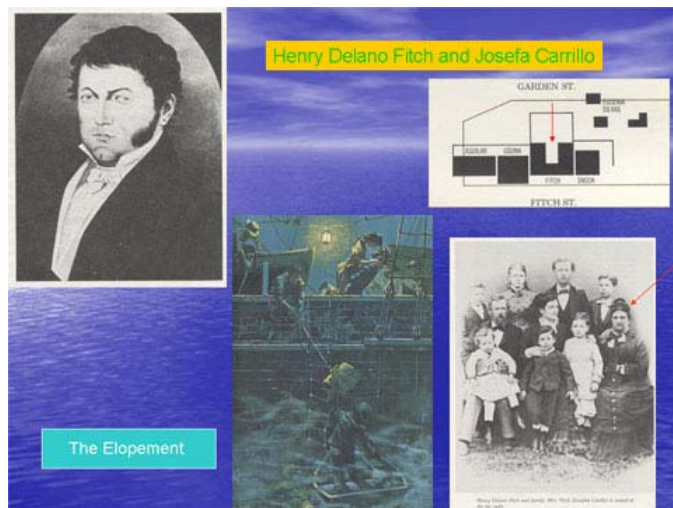
### *Joaquín Carrillo and María Ignacia de la Candelaria Lopez*

This couple may have been the first residents of Block 408 based on Judge Hayes' statement that the "Fitch House" was built in 1821. Since Henry Delano Fitch only came on the scene at the end of that decade, the house had to have been owned by someone else. It is most probable that it would have been the parents of Fitch's wife, Josefa Carrillo, the eldest daughter, who owned the house (Cf. Pourade 1963:11)

The Carrillo family would have constituted a sizeable number of people living on the block, only to be followed by the even larger Fitch family.

### *Henry Delano Fitch and María Antonia Natalia Elijah Josefa Carrillo*

A prominent family on block 408 was that of the sea captain and merchant, Henry Delano Fitch. Fitch married the eldest daughter of Joaquin Carrillo, after a dramatic elopement and eventual return to San Diego. They subsequently had a family of eleven children. Although the first child shown in the San Diego mission records was born in 1832, there was a previous baby born prior to their return to San Diego.

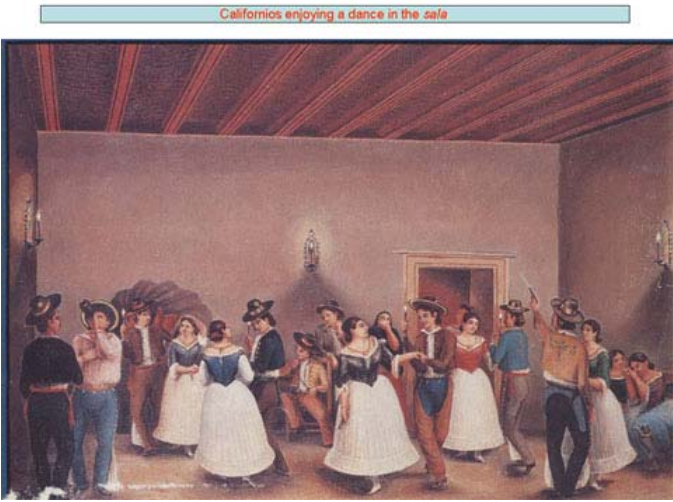


At some point the Fitches took over the large [presumably Carrillo?] family house that faced onto Fitch Street (Pourade 1963:11). According to Hayes (1874:79), this house was built in 1821, making it the earliest known residence in Old Town. By 1833 Captain Fitch operated his store out of his home (Ogden 1981:240), but

later he built a separate store nearby. Until that time, Fitch utilized part of the next-door Osuna home to store his inventory.

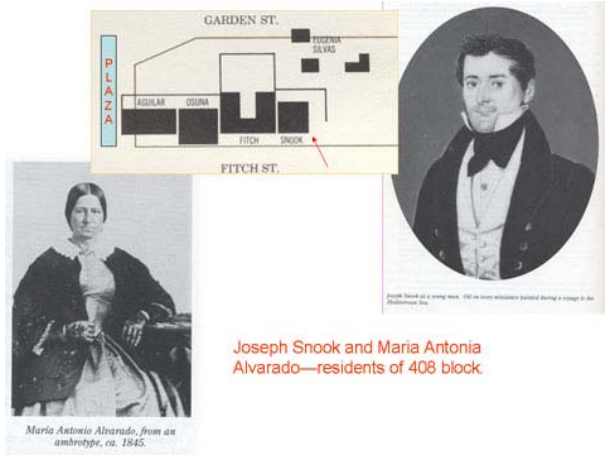
**Juan María Osuna and Josefa Lopez**

The property next to that of the Fitches was the house owned by Juan María Osuna. Osuna was married to Juliana Lopez. Osuna was known most particularly for having been the first elected alcalde of the newly established pueblo of San Diego on January 1, 1835. One of his daughters, Felipa, married Juan María Marrón and figures prominently due to her memoirs taken down by Thomas Savage in 1878. Osuna is believed to have obtained his lots on Block 408 in 1838. His house in San Diego was described as consisting of “one hall (*sala*), one room, kitchen, corral and a *dispensa* (storage room for food)” (Will of Juan María Osuna, cited in Killea 1975:334). The word “hall” (*sala*) in Spanish was a large multipurpose room used for meals, dances, etc.



**Joseph Snooks and María Antonia Alvarado**

American sea captain Joseph (José Francisco) Snooks, married Maria Antonia Alvarado at the San Diego presidio chapel on December 2, 1837. The married couple then took up residence next door to the Fitches. Snooks apparently supplemented his income by selling “a lettle groge (sic)” (Collings 1997:245-246). This is interesting in light of a later court action (in 1853) in which his widow, Maria Antonia Alvarado was accused of operating a “low groggery” in San Diego. Snooks died in 1848 and it is probable that his wife ran onto hard times following his demise and thus may have fallen back onto selling liquor after his death. Since liquor was generally



Maria Antonia Alvarado, from an ambrotype, ca. 1845.

Joseph Snook and Maria Antonia Alvarado—residents of 408 block.

stored in barrels at that time, archaeological evidence would be more in the form of tumblers used to serve the liquor.

### ***María Eugenia Silvas***

María Eugenia Silvas is the least known individual living on the block. However, due to a descendant of one of her brothers, named Abel Silvas, she has become an important link to the early history of the site. She provides a good example of some of the people who are often “missing” in the histories of an area.

From various mission records we know that she appeared as a godmother in baptisms as early as 1813 and then married a soldier named Diego Lisalde in 1816. When her first children were born in 1817 and 1819, her husband was a leather jacket soldier at the presidio and the baptisms took place there. In 1821, they were evidently stationed at Mission San Gabriel, but back in San Diego by 1823 because at the birth of her daughter, Juliana Lisalde, her husband is said to be the mayordomo of Mission San Diego. At that time, she would probably have been living at the mission.

More indications of her presence in the area is found in the marriage record of her first daughter, Maria Francisca Elisalde, who married soldier Antonio Ygnacio Rosas on September 30, 1832 in the church of the presidio of San Diego. “At the time of her marriage she was listed as being a single woman of the presidio (San Diego Marriage #1784). Since San Diego had not yet achieved official pueblo status at that time, it may be that the houses in Old Town were considered part of the presidio. On the other hand, it could indicate that Maria Francisca Elisalde (who was 15 at the time) was still living with her mother in the presidio.

Following the death of Lisalde (date unknown), Maria Eugenia remarried. Her second husband was Calixto José Antonio Ybarra. They were presumably married sometime before the birth of their first child in 1832. Other children came along in 1834, 1838, 1841 and 1844, all baptized in San Diego.

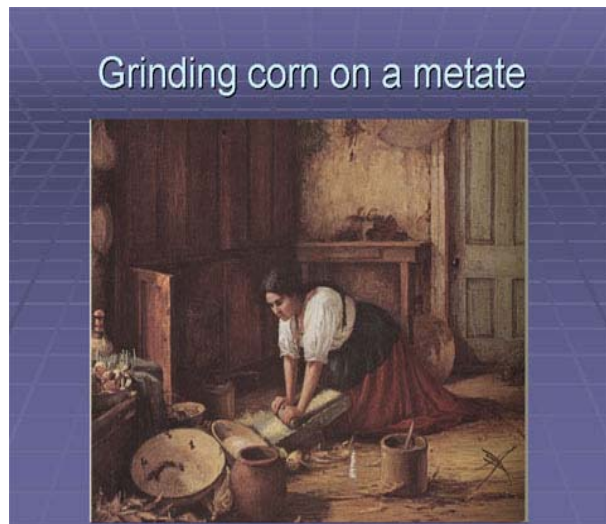
Eugenia’s next appearance is in the account records of Henry Delano Fitch in 1849 (Fitch Papers n.d.) and then in the record of sale of her property to Julian Ames in 1851. Finally, we find her in Los Angeles in 1852 (California State Census) -- and nothing after that.

Thus, we can certainly establish her presence in the vicinity of San Diego since at least 1813, but no real proof of her residence in the house that bears her name by virtue of her sale of the property in 1851. She is notably absent in the list of property owners for 1850 as shown in the tax assessment list for that year (San Diego County 1850). It is hard to determine what this means except that we cannot confirm her ownership of property in Old Town in 1850.

## Indians in the Pueblo of San Diego

A number of the families had Indian servants. This was probably even more the case following the secularization of the missions in 1834-35. Whereas some of the former neophytes were sent to develop Indian pueblos (cf. Farris 1997:119), others sought employment with the various families resident in the pueblo or on ranchos. The duties of these Indian servants at the pueblo were essentially those of household servants. In some cases the family cook would be an Indian male. Although this may seem strange, it was quite common in the missions of California. Following the secularization of the missions, men trained to cook for the priests would very likely have sought employment with Mexican families. Other Indian servants helped in various ways around the house as maids, food preparers, child care helpers, and gardeners. The availability of this servant class provided an elevated lifestyle for the Californio families. It is almost certain that most if not all of the mundane household activities (cooking, cleaning, collecting firewood, slaughtering animals, grinding corn and grains for food, etc.) would have been relegated to the Indian servants.

The fact of there being a sizable number of Indian servants in the pueblo of San Diego is made particularly clear in a census or *padrón* of the pueblo of San Diego dated April 17, 1836 (Hayes ms. n.d., item 296). At least 26 servants and their families are listed for 13 individual Californio household heads. In most cases, it is the woman of the house who is identified in this census.



### ***Padron de todas las familias de los indigenes que se hallan en el p.<sup>to</sup> de San Diego que sirviendo a sus amos.***

#### **CASADOS (Married)**

Sirviente de Señora Rafaela [Maria Rafaela Antonia Serrano, 1788-1846]	Alcalde <u>José Suis</u> [sic, Luis]
Sirviente del 1 <sup>o</sup> Regidor C <sup>oo</sup> Juan M <sup>a</sup> Marron [wife Felipa Osuna de Marrón]	Idem <u>Alcalde 2<sup>o</sup> Juan</u> , casado con Vicenta y su nieto chico, Ygnacio (see below).
Sirviente de Señora Feliciano [Feliciano Valdez-Reyes]	<u>Guillermo</u> , casado con Victoria - Tiene hijos, Sirvestre Candelaria y Ortiz

Sirviente de Don Santiago [Santiago Argüello and his wife was María del Pilar Salvadora Ortega]	<u>Juan Pedro</u> , casado con M. <sup>a</sup> y tiene dos hijos, Maria Luisa y Augustin
Sirviente de Señora Rafaela, su hijo Tomas de Moreno	<u>Mariano</u> , casado con Clara - tiene dos hijos Tomas y José Antonio
Ydem con Señora Rafaela [Serrano]	<u>Teperchaé</u> , casado con M. <sup>a</sup> Antonia, y una nieta chica M. <sup>a</sup> Eusebia
Sirvientes de D. <sup>a</sup> M. <sup>a</sup> Osuna [probably Maria Felipa de Jesus Caterina Osuna]	<u>Petra, Diana; Ollegó</u> , casado con Rafaela, exercisio pescador
Sirviente de Señora Luz Ruiz [María de la Luz Ruiz, wife of Juan María Marrón, the elder]	<u>Ignacio</u> , casado con Pilar - tiene una hija viuda llamada Isabel y una restituta viuda  <u>Pelegrino Camacho</u> , casado con M. <sup>a</sup> Concepcion, ocupado deporse en su huerta.
Sirviente de Don Andrés Pico [unmarried]	<u>Anastasio</u> , Gentil, casado con M. <sup>a</sup> Luisa y un hijo de pecho
Sirviente de Don José Ant. <sup>o</sup> Estudillo <sup>1</sup>	<u>José Maria</u> , casado con Bonifacia, y hijo chico

### SOLTEROS (Single people)

Sirviente de Doña Magdalena [Estudillo?]	<u>Geronima</u>
Sirviente de Señora Feliciana [Valdez-Reyes]	<u>Guadalupe, Lucas, José y Antonio</u>
Sirviente de Señora Raimunda [Maria Raimunda Yorba [married to Juan Bautista Alvarado, 12 September 1809, Mission SD]	<u>José Antonio</u>
Sirviente de Don Juan Bandini [wife was Maria de los Dolores Verdugo]	<u>Juan Miguel</u> , casado con Juana y otro <u>Miguel</u> , soltero
Sirviente de Señora [Maria] Tomasa Pico [wife of Francisco Maria Dolores Canuto Alvarado, married at SD 24	<u>Tomas</u> , gentil, casado con Maria y sus hijos chicos

1 In late 1829, Alfred Robinson (1846:65) stayed with José Antonio Estudillo, his wife, Maria Victoria Dominguez and her mother, Maria de los Reyes Ibañez during his stay in San Diego. He mentioned that at the time the family had three servants. These may well have been the servants listed here: José Maria, his wife, Bonifacia and their young son.



May, 1829]	
Sirvientes de Señora Luis (sic) Ruiz [Maria de la Luz Ruiz]	<u>Juan Pedro</u> , mudo [mute]; y <u>Tomas</u> , soltero
do de Capitan Fitch [and his wife, Josefa Carrillo]	<u>Pedro</u> y <u>José Maria</u> , Gentiles
do de Señora Rafaela [Serrano]	<u>Chrisanto</u>
do de [Josef] Manuel Machado [his wife was Maria Serafina Valdez]	<u>José Maria</u> , casado con Basilia, y <u>Flario</u> , soltero, gentiles
do de Don Santiago [Argüello]	<u>Loreto</u>

### ***Servants at San Diego further identified in the Mission Records***

To take a single example of what can be found by a careful scrutiny of the mission records, I will focus on a couple who were in the household of Regidor Juan María Marron. An Indian named Juan held the title of 2<sup>nd</sup> [Indian] Alcalde and was said to be married to a woman named Vicenta. The San Diego mission records inform us that Juan's full name was Juan Melsisi (SD bapt. 1686) who was baptized at Mission San Diego on November 24, 1806. His parents were Santiago Melsisi (SD bapt. 1145) and his mother was María Guadalupe (SD bapt. 619). She was from a village named San Francisco del Rincon.

Juan Melsisi married Vicenta on February 4, 1829 (SD marr. 1686). Vicenta's parents were from San Miguel in Baja California. Her father was Pablo Cruz and her mother was named Tomasa (but she was dead at the time of Vicenta's marriage). Juan and Vicenta had a child named Ygnacio, baptized on March 28, 1833 (SD Bapt. 6539) and another child, Maria Guadalupe, baptized on March 13, 1831 (SD bapt. 6417). The *Padrón* of 1836 shows 3 year old Ygnacio.

## **Indian Uprising of 1837**

Another source of information on the Indians resident in San Diego comes from the accounts of a major Indian uprising that occurred in the late 1830s. In the spring of 1837 there was a great deal of political turmoil in California between southern California loyalists like Agustin Zamorano and Juan Bandini who were faithful to the Central government in Mexico against the insurgent group, mainly in the north, led by Juan Bautista Alvarado. As a means to weaken the southern group, it appears that the northern faction incited the Indians of the San

Southern loyalists versus northern Secessionists:  
Indian Uprising of 1837



Diego District to rise up and attack various ranchos in the area. Since the military command was in disarray in the area, it was left up to Zamorano and a number of other individuals from San Diego to attempt to put down the uprising. When they interrogated some captured Indians, they learned the disturbing news that they were being instigated by Northern faction forces (Harding 1934).

Some interesting insight into life in the pueblo is given in the memoirs concerning this event of several old residents including José Maria Estudillo (1878), Felipa Osuna de Marrón (1878), Juana Machado de Wrightington (1878) and William Heath Davis. In addition to tales of the insurrection in the countryside, all four related a story of a plot by a group of Indian domestic servants in San Diego. The plotters were to rob the Fitch store, kill the individual managing it for Fitch, and kidnap Mrs. Fitch (Josefa Carrillo de Fitch) and Mrs. Marrón (Felipa Osuna de Marrón). By one account, the plot was foiled by Felipa Osuna thanks to her knowledge of the Indian language and the servants involved were pursued and executed by soldiers. One of these alleged plotters was a servant in the Estudillo home, named Juan Antonio. He was the cook and much beloved of the young José Maria Estudillo who remembered the soldiers under Alferez Macedonio Gonzalez coming to the house and finding Juan Antonio hiding under his bed. The Indian servant, Juan Antonio, was then dragged away to be executed by shooting along with others identified as being involved in the plot (Estudillo 1878:8 ff.).

The story of this abortive plot is interesting in several respects. One is the confirmation of there having been Indian men often living in the households which could help explain the number of Indian artifacts found around the location of the Silvas adobe. It is also of interest to realize that the Fitch household was in the same block as the Silvas site. Part of the plot was to sneak up on Mrs. Fitch when she went out in the early hours of the morning to knead the bread-dough for the morning bread in the kitchen/eating place. The Indians would then slip into the doorway in the darkness and kill Fitch's clerk, rob the store and make off with the women.

This description indicates that certain parts of the cooking process were retained by the matron of the household (Osuna de Marrón 1878:20-21). The *comedor* was often an open eating place on the back *corredor* of the household (Edna Kimbro, personal communication 1995). The interaction of the Indian men visiting back and forth between the various households would also seem

### *El Capitan* of the Indians of San Diego circa 1851-1870s

- José Manuel Hatam was the *capitan* of the *rancheria* of the Indians of the town of San Diego in the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.



conducive to sitting around casually working on making tools or playing games in the backyards. The account mentions that their weapons were to be "sharp pointed arrows" indicating that even despite their level of acculturation, arrows, not guns were the weapons available. Thus, the discovery of a glass projectile point in the backyard of the Silvas adobe may be seen as not so surprising in this context.

## **Continued Indian Presence in Old Town**

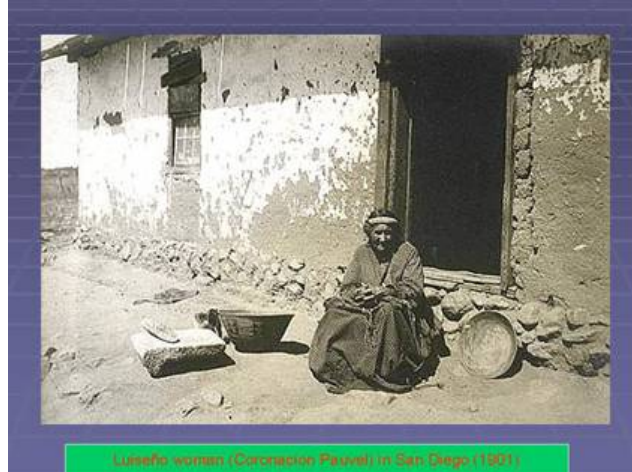
An Indian presence in the vicinity of Old Town continued for many years and it appears that it was not simply a haphazard set of shacks, but was organized sufficiently to have their own elected officials (alcaldes) in addition to a "capitan". An article in 1873 mentions the recent election of two alcaldes and the continued leadership of "El Capitan" (San Diego Weekly World 1873b). The rancharia was characterized in the article as being a half mile from the courthouse and in another article that it was near the "Barracks." In two other articles, also published in 1873 we learn that "El Capitan" was addressed as Manuel and had been elected to the post of *capitan* nineteen years before (ca. 1854)" (San Diego Weekly World, January 4, 1873; March 8, 1873). Richard Carrico (1987:49) published a photograph dated to 1874 of a man named José Manuel Hatam "respected Indian leader from a band inhabiting present-day Balboa Park circa 1874." It is probable that this is the same individual described in the newspaper articles.

Indians continued to live around San Diego and in Mission Valley until about 1910 when white and Asian populations began to take over all the land in the area and the Indians were expelled as being squatters. According to Florence Shipek (1991:9-10) most of the Indians had left the San Diego area by 1920 and most of them ended up in northern Baja California. This was where Dr. Shipek located her now-famous consultant, Delfina Cuero.

## **Conclusions**

It is clear that life in San Diego during the years of the Mexican pueblo was not strictly the bucolic, sleepy existence so often portrayed by foreign visitors. Certainly, the years 1825-1831 when the governor of California, José Maria Echeandia, resided in San Diego, would have given the presidio and its nearby pueblo a greater degree of official importance. The developing families with their numerous children, the arrival of foreigners, and the presence of Indian families and single individuals in many households provides a view of the demographics that certainly had its effect on the archaeological remains to be found in Old Town San Diego. With the secularization of the missions, many Indians found themselves pushed out to eke out livings on their own. Being largely shut out of the land grants, many of these people had to find employment on the ranchos

being doled out to Mexican nationals or domestic work in the village of San Diego. Internecine warfare in California, nominally between the North and South, but more specifically between Mexican government loyalists and supporters of home rule by native born governors. About the year 1837 the combination of events resulted in a number of Indian uprisings against the rancheros as well as a plot against citizens of San Diego.



The amount of animal remains and general refuse strewn on the ground is definitely reflected in the excavation findings. Aspects of outdoor cookery contributed to the numerous ash features that appear on the site. Overall, our historic research has helped better understand the range of people who would have contributed to the archaeological record in early San Diego.

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