CHAPTER 3

CONSUMERISM, LIVING CONDITIONS,
AND MATERIAL WELL-BEING

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In general, life is better than it has ever been, and if you think that, in the past, there was some golden age of pleasure and plenty to which you would, if you were able, transport yourself, let me say one single word: Dentistry

P.J. O’Rourke

The story of 19th-century America is one of urbanization, industrialization, and the cultural changes that accompanied these processes. In 1850 a mere 15 percent of the U.S. population lived in towns; in 1900 the proportion had grown to 40 percent. At the same time, immigration was, quite literally, changing the face of the nation. By the late 19th century, the result was a nation of teeming urban centers populated in large number by people who were separated by only one generation from traditional rural cultures in both the United States and Europe.

These were the precursors to modern Americans, and their experiences have helped to shape contemporary American values and mores (Figure 3.1). By studying them we can better understand the present. The process by which these immigrants adapted to and were affected by life in industrialized America is one of the most important issues in American history. By the same token, the essential role of artifacts (both manufactured and incidental) is an important theme in the era’s historical archaeology (Gutman 1977; Teague 1987). The process was, of course, very complex and some aspects of it are less amenable to a primarily archaeological study than others. The guiding tenet of this study, however, is that artifacts are material culture; as aspects of culture, they can only be understood within a behavioral and historic context. The Cypress collection is particularly well suited to this approach because the assemblages of which it is composed are derived from segments of the population of known demographic and ethnic character.

This chapter is a fairly straightforward study of the evidence relating to the material well-being of various West Oakland populations, as exemplified by particular clusters of households. We are using the term “well-being” to cover two of the material aspects of life that contribute to the feeling of comfort and satisfaction: consumer goods and health and nutrition. The skeptical reader should not infer that we consider these characteristics to be the sole determinants of either contentment or feelings of relative deprivation. They are, however, aspects of life that have fairly unambiguous material correlates; they are therefore quite accessible to archaeological analysis through which we can get at the material outcomes of 19th-century consumerism and the way social differences may or may not have been expressed and reinforced by various segments of the population. The short essays in this chapter touch on various aspects of consumer goods, including clothing, patent medicine, ceramics, the influence of spiritual teaching and advertising on consumer practices, and some of the consumer choices made by immigrant Jews. The main essay explores the topic of health and nutrition using statistical analyses of faunal remains.

47
CONSUMER GOODS

The 19th century saw the coming together of both a desire to acquire material possessions and the ability to do so on a massive scale. This was scarcely a coincidence, for the consumerism of the era was fueled by the availability of commodities and a system of social values that encouraged their purchase, what Karl Marx termed commodity fetishism. But the use of these concepts requires some explanation. By commodity, we mean something that is produced for the purpose of exchange. In modern times, this exchange is mediated by money. Commodities are made for their exchange value, rather than their use value—they are not created for what they can do but for what their maker can receive for them in exchange (Marx 1978 [1867]). Historical archaeologists retrieve commodities in the form of objects used for household decoration and display, as well as items of personal adornment. By consumerism, we mean that preoccupation with the acquisition of goods created and distributed en masse for that purpose. McKendrick (1982) sees the origins of consumerism in the 18th century, but it is in the 19th century where we see its florescence in the ready availability of a vast range of items heretofore available only to the wealthy.

Luxury items, however, should not be thought of in contrast to necessities, as if the latter have more veracity than the former. Appadurai points out that so-called luxuries are simply “goods whose principal use is rhetorical and social, goods that are incarnated signs” rather than having a utilitarian function (1986:38). The special status of these goods is socially assigned on the basis of (among other criteria) their cost, difficulty of acquisition, and the specialized knowledge necessary to employ them effectively (Appadurai 1986:32-38). The latter is of particular interest, in that fashion is seen as the mainspring of material change in a consumer society (Bell 1976). The significance
of these insights will emerge as we investigate the role of food, particularly meat, in our households’ visions of themselves.

Although the individual experiences it as desire, consumer demand does not originate with the individual but from external forces such as advertising and social pressure; it is a change in the idiom (fashion) that causes a change in demand. Paul Shackel (1998) noted many examples of the discard of consumer artifacts en masse around the turn of the 18th century. Although archaeologists have explained these episodes individually by everything from demographic transitions to ideological change, Shackel believes that the overriding pattern of disposal is a function of the value given to constant replacement within a consumption-oriented society. This interpretation harks back to Veblen’s (1899) study of the consumption patterns of 19th-century middle-class Americans, in which he demonstrated how social value was assigned to the constant acquisition and rapid relinquishment of luxury commodities. The tastemakers of the Victorian era were surely working overtime.

A topic of interest to archaeologists in recent years has been the investigation of the degree to which social identity has increasingly been defined by consumption patterns. Much of this work seeks to use the quantity and nature of consumer goods principally as indicators of social class and wealth: since more affluent people could have bought more expensive goods, the archaeological expression of wealth is in the presence of expensive artifacts. Although this logic is seemingly unassailable, LouAnn Wurst and Randy McGuire have roundly criticized the approach, for its emphasis on the individual as an autonomous agent. “The issue,” they point out, “is not what people buy, but the social relations that enable and constrain what they buy” (Wurst and McGuire 1999:196). To this, we might add a critique of the commodity fetishism of archaeologists, who have been keen to study the idiom—the artifacts themselves—than the processes that created these objects and put them into the houses of our forebears.

Historical archaeology is not the history of artifacts. On their own these materials are unimportant, except as mementos. Their importance is in their ability to elucidate important themes in American history and culture change. From this perspective, the issue is not of mere academic interest but one through which we can obtain important insights into contemporary society. By documenting consumerism as a process created in a particular era out of identifiable social conditions, we emphasize that it is not a natural and timeless feature of human existence but a creation of our modern economic system and modern sensibilities. Nineteenth-century people were no more naïve or easily manipulated than we. The idiom has changed—laptop computers and SUVs have replaced the sumptuous wardrobe and tastefully decorated parlor—but the process is surely continuing at as rapid a pace now, with global implications for both the exploitation of workers from the industrializing world and the degradation of the global environment.

**Selling the Christmas Spirit: The Creation of a Consumer Holiday**

*Annita Waghorn*

Of all the American holidays, Christmas bears the greatest weight of custom, expectation, and ambivalence. Even secular and non-Christian Americans know, as if by instinct, what a proper Christmas should be: It’s about family, gifts, food, indulgence, and charity. For many, the religious meaning of the holiday—the birth of humanity’s savior, Jesus Christ—is little more than a sweet story. This is the modern Christmas and, like many traditions, part of its appeal is its deeply familiar and ageless feel. Yet these traditions are little more than a century old. The
roots of the modern Christmas lie in 19th-century efforts to domesticate a festival with strong pre-Christian origins and, coincidently, to harness its emotional potential to fuel the American industrial and commercial machine.

Until the mid-1900s, mid-winter celebrations in America centered not on Christmas but on New Year’s Day, when the winter solstice was celebrated (Schmidt 1995:109). And it was primarily a communal celebration marked by visiting between friends, drinking, public rowdiness, and a mild anarchy that expressed relief and anticipation as winter began its slow turn towards spring (Nissenbaum 1997:90). Christmas, one week earlier, was primarily a quiet religious event.

The 1820s saw the rise of two movements that would eventually coalesce to shape the modern Christmas rite. To combat the communal, lower-class associations of an alcohol-fueled New Year celebration, temperance reformers and their supporters sought to develop Christmas as an alternative holiday that focused instead on children, the family, and the home (Nissenbaum 1997:95). They did this by progressively distancings and contrasting the celebration of the two holidays, praising the home-centered Christmas while disparaging the rowdy public celebrations of New Year. Special food and decorations that transformed the home into a setting focused on Christmas were also promoted (Figure 3.2). At the same time, manufacturers and storeowners began to appreciate the commercial potential of religious celebrations such as Christmas and Easter. Creating new markets for goods, particularly those of a nonessential nature, became increasingly important during the 19th century, as the new efficiencies and machinery of American industry began to outstrip demand for basic products (Schmidt 1995:32). Christmas was fertile ground for the spirit of enterprise.

Although manufactured presents had been advertised since the early 1800s, before the mid-century gifts tended to be practical, handmade, and unwrapped tokens given to family not at Christmas, but on New Year’s Day (Nissenbaum 1997:136; Waits 1993:16). Much effort towards the reinvention of Christmas was concentrated on shifting the custom of gift-giving from New Year’s to Christmas. The promotion of Christmas as a family holiday with children at its center eased the adoption of the festival as the most appropriate time for exchanging gifts, especially between family members. The expectations around gifts themselves also began to grow as the character of a gift was increasingly seen to be symbolic of the value placed by the giver on the relationship with the recipient (Waits 1993:34).

Even as consumer-oriented culture was picking up steam, Victorian Americans continued to feel a deep unease with purchasing gifts and so attaching a monetary value to relationships. The exchange of money necessary to
purchase a manufactured gift somehow tainted the item with the crass values of the market place. For this reason, and despite the steady growth in advertisements for manufactured Christmas presents after the 1820s, many people persisted in feeling that handmade items were best since they represented an investment of one’s own time and labor, and were personalized for the recipient.

Storeowners and manufacturers were quick to recognize the roots of this resistance to the manufactured, purchased gift, and moved to “sanitize” prospective gifts of their marketplace associations. These ingenious techniques included the sale of semi-finished items, such as handkerchief squares or blank cards, that allowed the purchaser to contribute enough finishing work to qualify them as handmade gifts (Waits 1993:18, 21, 23, 27). Semi-finished gifts reflected the tension felt by many people in their transition from a pre-modern agricultural-based economy to the urbanized consumerist culture of the late 19th century (Waits 1993). Not surprisingly, the popularity of semi-finished items as gifts declined in the early 20th century, as Americans grew more comfortable with the consumer culture and the unmodulated link between money and personal relationships through purchased gifts.

Other tricks used to ease the transformation from goods to gifts involved selling items ready-wrapped and by claiming that items had been especially manufactured for Christmas giving. The most successful technique of all, however, was to use symbolic intermediaries to distance commercialism from the process of giving. The most successful of these is Santa Claus who, a descendent of the historical figures of Saint Nicholas and Kris Kringle, was adopted by 1880s advertisers as an appealing way to link the values of the personalized and the handmade to factory-produced items.

The domesticated commercial Christmas was in full swing by the 1880s and was readily embraced in growing cities like Oakland (Figure 3.3). December newspapers of the 1880s and 1890s contained pages of Christmas advertisements, and the holiday became a financial lynchpin of the Oakland commercial year: civic leaders in 1888 expressed satisfaction that poor weather would persuade many locals to patronize Oakland’s stores rather than taking their valued Christmas business across the bay to San Francisco (Oakland Enquirer 22 December 1888).

Oakland storekeepers encouraged the practice of Christmas giving by presenting small tokens to their customers. Several items from the Cypress archaeological collection attest to these efforts to promote the commercial Christmas: a small plastic and metal button dating from pre-1906 and found in refuse left by the Bankhead family at 812 Market Street advertises the Oakland store of Saligners, with an image of a jolly Santa Claus. More evidence of the attempts to associate gifts, indulgences in food and drink, and the Christmas spirit was a glass alcohol flask from the privy of the Holderer family at 793 Wood Street, emblazoned with “Christmas ’93” (Figure 3.4).
One outcome of the commercialization of Christmas and Easter was to provide the young American nation with a set of unifying traditions. At a time when westward expansion and large-scale immigration was contributing to the development of distinct cultural regions within the country, the rituals of the commercialized holidays created shared secular traditions and experiences (Schmidt 1995:33). The drive to transform these holidays met with some resistance, for a theme of anti-consumerism ran through late 19th-century Victorian culture, although it has largely been obscured by the stereotype of Victorians as enthusiastic consumers. Drawing on republican-era suspicions of the corrupting influence of great wealth, anti-consumerists objected to the conspicuous display demanded by the developing culture (Barton 1989:61). As sociologist Edward Alsworth Ross thundered in 1909, it was a threat to the democratic basis for American society: “The rich are gangreened with pride, the poor with envy. Unless democracy mends the distribution of wealth, the mal-distribution of wealth will end democracy” (quoted in Barton 1989:58).

The late-Victorian Christmas, with its emphasis on an ever-lengthening shopping season and more numerous and expensive gifts, was a prime target for the anti-materialist movement. Many middle-class women, who were increasingly responsible for the family’s Christmas preparations, betrayed their ambivalence towards the demands of the consumer Christmas in their diaries, writing of the exhaustion and sense of reluctant duty that had begun to taint the season (Schmidt 1995:154-157). The consumer Christmas, however, rolled inexorably onward. We modern Americans are its inheritors and willingly (or not) participate in the annual ritual of presents, gift-wrap, and general excess that hits the malls the day after the Thanksgiving turkey decorations come down.

**The Specter of Spiritualism in Oakland**

*Michael Meyer*

In 1848 when gold was discovered in California, the most powerful religious influence in the eastern United States was evangelicalism. This revivalistic Protestant movement encompassed the Baptist, Congregational, Disciples of Christ, Methodist, and Presbyterian denominations, as well as a variety of small sects, and stood in opposition to Roman Catholicism, the predominant religion of Spanish California (Frankiel 1988:ix). That same year, on the eve of the Gold Rush, the Spiritualist movement in America was also beginning (Doyle 1926:11).

As Argonauts from around the world streamed into California, the Roman Catholic Church lost its hold on California and ties to established, East Coast evangelical institutions were broken as well. The California Gold Rush was unique, as poor men with limited capital were able to extract wealth from public lands and reinvent themselves. This model fit well with the Spiritualist belief in life after death and of spiritual growth and completion (Frankiel 1988:34-35).
Laurentine Hamilton, an Oakland Presbyterian minister, gave a series of sermons in 1868 that rejected the idea of eternal damnation. His church accused him of heresy. Yet for Spiritualists, this idea was at the core of their progressive ideology that had begun with abolition and embraced women's suffrage, health reform, marriage reform or “free love,” children's rights, labor reform, dress reform, vegetarianism, temperance, utopianism, and, above all, religious reform (Braude 1989:3, 125-129; Kerr 1972:11).

As they lacked a conventional organizational structure, the Spiritualists kept few records and the total number of active participants is unknown. The first lectures on Spiritualism in San Francisco were presented in 1859 (Schlesinger 1896). Spiritualist newspapers were published in cities throughout the country; the *Carrier Dove* was originally published in Oakland and later in San Francisco. By 1890 three Spiritualist journals were published in California (*Carrier Dove* 1890:261). Two Spiritualist state conventions were held in Oakland during the 1880s, and meetings were held each Thursday evening at Curtis Hall on the city block bounded by Brush/Fifth/Sixth/Market streets (*Carrier Dove* 1886:302)—what would become Block 3 of the Cypress Archaeology Project.

Marshall Curtis moved to Oakland soon after he arrived in California from Massachusetts in 1853. City directories of the early 1870s listed him as a land agent or in real estate. By 1862 Curtis owned all of Block 3 and was probably the first private owner (*Oakland Enquirer* 28 June 1889). He later owned the opposite Sixth Street block frontage and was also partner in the Curtis Williams tract further north, where Curtis and Lydia (his wife) streets are located.

Curtis made his money through real estate, a favored investment of capitalists and speculators at the time. By 1878 he had changed his occupation listed in city directories to “proprietor of Liberty Hall” and “magnetic physician” (Oakland City Directories: v.d.). Marshall Curtis was one of the most prominent Spiritualists in the city. His listing as a “magnetic physician” was synonymous with Spiritualism (Armstrong 1991). Liberty Hall was located at 835 Brush Street, north of Block 3, and was listed in the directories from 1875 to 1879. Like many similar buildings throughout Oakland, it was available to rent for private functions. Curtis Hall, at 767 Sixth Street on Block 3, was similarly listed in 1887. According to the *Carrier Dove*:

‘Father Curtis’ has erected, near Market-street Station, a pleasant, commodious hall, the use of which is given free for all Spiritual services, and at which place Mr. Ravlin will hold meetings on Thursday of each week. These meetings, we understand, are to be of the nature of social reunions, and will prove exceedingly entertaining and pleasant [1886:302].

The meetings at Curtis Hall likely attracted Flora London, Jack London’s mother. In such a small community, Flora was probably acquainted with Marshall Curtis, although her endeavors into the spiritual world were less benevolent. A biographical sketch speaks of her, own efforts as a medium:

The rearing of young Johnny London was left to his stepsisters and his stepfather, who was devoted to his adopted son. Flora increasingly spent her time thinking of schemes to raise the family above its working class status - and holding séances in which she served the medium for an ‘Indian Chief’ called ‘Plume’ who spoke from the ‘Spirit World’ [Herron 1985:184].

In 1887 the London family lived at 807 Pine Street, on Cypress Block 20; at another time they were much closer to Curtis Hall, at Seventh and Adeline, on or near Cypress Block 9.
To the Spiritualists, Marshall Curtis was known as “Father Curtis.” His obituaries in the *Carrier Dove* and the *Oakland Enquirer* both gave testimony to his devotion. The very presence of Curtis Hall was significant considering that in 1890 the San Francisco Spiritualists were without a temple of their own although the meetings there were larger than those in East Coast cities (*Carrier Dove* 1890:261). Curtis’s obituary in the *Oakland Enquirer* stated that “…about ten years ago he was partially paralyzed and has since been compelled to get about on crutches, but seldom went further than Market street station” (28 July 1889); he had previously owned much of the property at Market Street Station, a block from his home (Figure 3.5).

After Curtis died, his house lot at the corner of West and Sixth streets was sold to William J. Laymance, bookkeeper for a real-estate and auction firm with offices in San Francisco, as well as Oakland. The Laymance-Curtis connection extended beyond real estate, however, for Laymance also advertised in the *Carrier Dove* (1886:310).

After its owner’s death, Curtis Hall became first the Swedish Mission Church and, for a short time, the Ebeneezer Baptist church, with an African American congregation.

Privy 1785 on Cypress Block 3 was filled when Curtis was developing the site and building a new home for himself at the corner of Sixth and West (Market) streets in 1874. The archaeological remains provided few insights into the Spiritualist beliefs of Curtis and his family. The material representation of his beliefs is found on a much larger scale.

The construction of the transcontinental railroad terminus in Oakland some years before increased the value of the Curtis real-estate holdings. Curtis was one of the lucky landowners who saw their property values rise with construction of the Oakland and San Francisco Railroad, as well as the Central Pacific. Although he did not become exceedingly wealthy, Curtis was able to construct a new house and leave a sizable estate for his sons. Although it appears that Curtis was able to live off of his investments like a capitalist, he did not see himself in these terms.

By building Curtis Hall for the purpose of holding religious meetings, Curtis showed that he was, first and foremost, a Spiritualist, with that group’s ambivalence toward the era’s materialism. Julia Schlesinger’s 1896 address, titled “Practical Spiritualism,” expressed these anti-capitalist values:

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Figure 3.5. The Market Street Station. Looking east from Filbert towards Market in 1911, the tracks veer left where the Market Street tract meets the Original tract at the Market Street Station. After suffering partial paralysis about 1879, Marshall Curtis spent the last decade of his life using crutches to make the one-block trek to the station. He was probably visiting with neighbors and former tenants, such as Horace Clark, who purchased his confectionary store from Mr. Curtis. (Photo reproduced with permission from Vernon J. Sappers)
Error is sitting in high places, clothed in the royal vestments of power, while truth—sweet, loving, beautiful, truth—goes naked through the world. Greed and avarice are piling up their shining millions, while honor and virtue are starving in cellars and attics. Vice and idleness are arrayed in fine linen and purple, faring sumptuously every day, while honest labor is clothed in rags, and goes begging for its just dues. The debauchee, who glorifies in the spoilation of innocence and virtue, is pampered and petted, feasted and praised, while his helpless and hapless victim is doomed to a life of shame and disgrace . . . See that your own life is pure, that your motives are unselfish, that your souls are full of love and charity for all humanity. Never lose an opportunity of saying a kind word, or reaching out a helping hand to any unfortunate struggling in the depths of despair, even though his own wrong-doing may have been the cause of his desolation and distress [1896:260].

The same publication contained “The Creed of Spiritualists,” in which the author, J.W. Reynolds, M.D., opined, “Every person is under a moral obligation to prevent poverty by working for the enhancement of laws for the just distribution of the products of labor, and also to help the deserving to the extent of his means” (1896:81).

By comparing the family’s wealth with the remains left to us in Privy 1785, it appears that Curtis practiced these Spiritualist ideals. While their tableware and diet were above average compared with other local residents, they were not as lavish as Curtis could afford. While the family lived in a larger, more stylish house than the capitalist Benjamin Mann on Block 1, there is no evidence that that the Curtis parlor or dining room was as lavishly decorated as the Manns’ (Figure 3.6; see also Privy 900 and Privy 1785 snapshots in Appendix D).

For Victorians, “the ideal house was to be a personal statement—a symbolic representation of what the owner stood for and valued. The ideal house was to function as a vehicle for displaying the civilized nature of its inhabitants” (Clark 1986:114). With the stylish design and large bay windows of his new house at Sixth and Market, Curtis used an accepted means of display to announce his membership in the middle class. But, he chose to use the development of the entire block as a display of good moral character and spiritual values. Rather than merely displaying order in a single room, Marshall Curtis had ordered an entire block. Curtis Hall was an obvious example of this, but the development of the entire block follows the pattern.

Since Curtis developed all but one corner of the block himself, he had control over what was built. While surrounding blocks were filled with more expensive homes of more uniform size, the worker’s cottages on Fifth Street were small. Since Curtis rented and eventually sold
most of his Block 3 holdings, he could have made a larger profit by building larger homes but instead chose to create a block of diverse house sizes for people of differing means (Figure 3.7).

While Curtis had done well for himself and his family, he was true to his Spiritualist values, creating housing that reflected “just distribution of the products of labor” (Reynolds 1896:81). During the 1870s, families of tradesmen like the Taylors at 768 Fifth occupied these rental cottages, which may have provided housing close to the much larger homes—what we have dubbed Polite Victorian Houses—that they, themselves were building.

Across the street was the large home of John Wright, a successful 49er who moved his family’s steamboat business from New York to San Francisco. Wright, a self-described capitalist, purchased the row of cottages from the Curtis family and must have kept a watchful eye on his investment from across the street, until selling his Fifth Street holdings and moving to the more fashionable shores of Lake Merritt.

A final example of the material expression of Curtis’s values can be found in Oakland’s Mountain View Cemetery. Curtis’s plot is marked with an obelisk that bears names of family members who proceeded him in death, but not his own. The modest monument is a third the size of John Wright’s, which stands nearby. Both the Curtis and Wright obelisks are dwarfed by the lavish tombs of city founder Edson Adams and railroad magnate Charles Crocker. Curtis’s Spiritualism would never have allowed his heirs to spend a great deal of money for such an ostentatious display. For him, Curtis Hall was a far more worthwhile investment.
Out for a Stroll: The Visual Experience of a Sunday Afternoon in West Oakland

Sunshine Psota

Oaklanders enjoy an afternoon at the merry-go-round at Shellmound Park. To the right, the man with a cigar donned a cap instead of the preferred wool-felt hat chosen by the rest of the men. Dressed for an outing, most of the men wear buttoned-up vests, ties, and a suit, oftentimes a pocket watch stuck into a vest pocket. More variety of fashion and dress can be seen in what women have chosen to wear. The fashionable light-colored skirts and waists, with their full 1890s sleeve, could be set off by anything from a straightforward hat worn by the woman on the far right to a straw hat by a woman on the far left, to extremely elaborate works of art by women at center right and the far left. (Photo courtesy Oakland Public Library, Oakland History Room)

Let’s go for an imaginary walk through West Oakland in the mid-1880s.

It is a beautiful autumn afternoon. The fog is tucked well out of sight beyond San Francisco, so the air is warm when you are in the sun. We are on Seventh Street, where everything from commerce and industry to what people are wearing is influenced by the ever-present railroad. Into this world steps an anonymous hotel manager who was hired by Mr. Frese, after his wife died, to help run the Railroad Exchange Hotel [1].

She is dressed in her Sunday best: a pink and black buffalo-plaid wool dress. Her skirt is narrow, reflecting this year’s fashion, with extra fabric gathered in the back to accentuate the full roundness of her artificially enhanced hips. The tight-fitting basque body is trimmed with small pleats and buttons; some lace softens the neckband [2]. The tight-fitting coat so restricts her movements that she must take it off to pin her hat on her head. She pauses thinking about which route to take—shall she head to the park on her afternoon off or just a saunter around the neighborhood?

Behind her, two of the male lodgers have also ducked out into the street. In contrast to her fashionable ensemble, they wear basic, wool sack coats (today called sport coats or just jackets) [3]. As lodgers, they enjoy the independence and flexibility of living in a respectable place with a night clerk and, therefore, no curfew [4]. While the rooms are compact, the neighborhood is a string of social connections and businesses where they interact daily. The men proceed on their way, perhaps for a
smoke outdoors or a visit to the hotel’s saloon next door for a drink or to chat with other Southern Pacific Railroad men. They are especially fond of the full-bodied, aromatic Cuban cigars of Colorado tobacco that the saloon usually has available to be inhaled in the company of friends [5].

Acknowledging them with a bob of her head, the woman strolls east on Seventh one block, turning left onto Cedar, and walks smartly across Goss Street. Here she passes the home of Ellen McLaughlin and her family, one of four houses on this side of the street. Although our stroller doesn’t know the young woman’s name, even in a group of her childhood friends, Ellen stands out as a smart dresser with an eye for the most current fashions. A dressmaker, Ellen wears a dress she fashioned from brown silk with fancy woven stripes, accessorized with a piece of inexpensive jewelry and her high-laced street shoes with fashionable sculptured heels [6]. In her business it is important to have a stylish dress that shows off both her assets and her abilities.

Throughout the neighborhoods, West Oaklanders are coming out of their homes and onto the streets, escaping their daily demands for a little while to socialize on this fine afternoon. Over on Fifth Street east of Market, Eunice Mann, Fredrick’s much-younger widow, has on her black silk dress. Walking slowly next to her teenage son, Fredrick Jr., the light catches the somber dress, highlighting the intricately woven floral design. The widow made these mourning clothes on a sewing machine. She had sewn the details, such as gathering and other touches, by hand while sitting next to the bedside of her poor sick brother-in-law, Benjamin; a welcome respite from his daily care [7]. While she takes her Sunday walk, Mrs. Mann’s two youngest daughters will look after their uncle. As she walks, she acknowledges with a nod her well-dressed neighbors Mrs. Lucinda Tilghman and Abraham Holland. The sun reflects off Abraham’s gold cuff links as he tilts his hat her way. The buttons, earrings, and gold pendant worn by Lucinda catch her eye. It is a sweet, heart-shaped pendant encircled with blue-glass beads [8].

In contrast to these well-dressed Sunday walkers are the Patrick Barry family, who live several blocks away on Linden. As Patrick is a worker for the Southern Pacific Railroad, they have a more modest budget for dressing, but still appear quite presentable by West Oakland’s fashion standards. As the family prepares to go for their after-dinner stroll, Mr. Barry is wearing a comfortable herringbone-twill jacket while his wife,
Ellen, must decide between a black basket-weave jacket of wool and silk or her brown-wool, fitted basque with decorative black-glass buttons [9].

Strolling is as much a social event as it is exercise. Seeing and being seen by neighbors, business associates, and others keeps up social contacts with little interactions. In this street scene, the women and children are a sea of colors, fabrics, and patterns, with different textures and sounds, including the rustling of silk as women walked. Bustles had returned to fashion in 1883, reaching their height and breadth in 1886, and then deflating over the next few years [10]. Fans and parasols were popular accessories. Recently introduced alkali dyes splashed strong colors on gaily dressed women in this urban landscape.

Men in the 1880s, as today, tend to be visually homogeneous. Their clothing at the time of our stroll was influenced by the change from handmade to the standardization of the ready-to-wear garments. The uniform varies little: each man dons a wool-felt hat and saunters around in wool trousers, vests, and sack coats. Black or brown are the most popular colors, with the occasional stripe, check, or tweed for casual wear. While styles did change with the years, they are far more subtle than those configured for women or children. For most working men, this meant that the suit you were married in became your Sunday best until it wore out or became so out of style that it attracted comment. Some of the common fashions seem timeless—like uncreased trousers. Other trends were subtle, as sack coats became shorter and narrower in fit. The trend in the 1870s to wear sack coats with only the top chest-height button fastened led, in the 1880s, to more buttons with a shorter lapel for a higher buttoned look. Then the top three or four buttons are buttoned, with the lower opening showing off the bottom of the vest and displaying a pocketwatch.

Our hotel manager quietly notes all the fashions of the neighborhood women, while keeping her eye on the neighborhood men and children. Generally, she notices, the older a person is, the more conservatively they dress. So while they never appear to be noticeably out of style, their clothes are never that fashionable. Younger people seem more concerned with keeping up with the changing fashion trends. The unmarried are usually the nattiest dressers, for most will have a job and be semi-independent for the first time in their life, and most are either entering or well-entrenched in the search for a mate.

Jack London summed up the situation in The Valley of the Moon: the number of shoes a woman had spoke eloquently of her life. Beautiful 24-year-old Saxon, London's main character, has dated several men but is not yet engaged. Working six days a week, she often goes out to dance on work nights and weekends. She makes many of her clothes and is very concerned with her appearance on these outings. Her sister-in-law, Sarah, complains about Saxon's behavior: why should she have new silk stockings and three pairs of shoes; poor Sarah can only afford cheap cotton stockings and one pair of shoes in decidedly bad shape [11]. While Saxon focuses only on herself, Sarah cares for the needs of her husband and children before her own vanity. The number of shoes seems so extravagant that the difference in their clothes is not even discussed.

On her way home, the new manager saunters by the Pullman Hotel to have a peek at the competition. Just a block away from the Railroad Exchange Hotel where she works, it doesn't appear quite as nice, though the lodgers, all railroad men, look about the same [12]. She looks away, distracted by the passing of a train down the middle of Seventh Street, and now she is back at the hotel, ready to settle down to the latest edition of Butterick's Delineator, A Journal of Fashion, Culture and Fine Arts. What would the experts have to say about next season's fashions?
Sources for "Out for a Stroll":

1. Information on the Railroad Exchange Hotel and Mr. Frese comes from Tax Rolls (1862-1866), City Directories (1869-1888), Block Books (1877-1887), U.S Census (1870, 1880), and M.W. Wood's *History of Alameda County*, 1883. This information is presented on the Documentary Research Table (DRT) on pp. 168-170 of *Block Technical Report: Historical Archaeology I-880 Cypress Replacement Project: Blocks 22, 24, and 29*, edited by Mary Praetzelis and Suzanne B. Stewart, 2001, prepared for the California Department of Transportation (hereafter referred to as Block 29 BTR). According to the census information, Mrs. Frese died between 1870 and 1880.

2. The description of the hotel manager's attire is based upon the remains of fabric, buttons, and jewelry found in the Railroad Exchange Hotel well (4600). A portion of the well extended below the water table, which resulted in the excellent preservation of fabric and other fragile artifact types that generally do not survive in archaeological contexts. The clothing remains are described in the Feature Summary (pp. 172-173) and tabulated on the Artifact Descriptive List (pp. 180-190) of the Block 29 BTR.

3. Remains of men's clothing were also recovered from Well 4600. A suit and hat are pictured on p. 172 of the Block 29 BTR, while the remains themselves are described and tabulated on pp. 172-173 and 180-190 of the BTR, respectively.


5. The Railroad Exchange Hotel had a bar from its inception, as shown by John Frese's 1863 tax assessment for bar fixtures. Twenty-one cigar boxes were recovered from the hotel's well, including some marked "El Aguila de Koeniggraetz/A. Bacallao C.M. Havana," "Flora Fina," and Flora de Loruo"; see DRT and Artifact Descriptive List of the Block 29 BTR. The smoking assemblage from the Railroad Exchange Hotel is shown in Figure 9.9, this volume.

6. Archaeologists excavated a series of deposits associated with Ellen McLaughlin's family at 881 Cedar Street on Cypress Block 27. These features are discussed in *Block Technical Report: Historical Archaeology I-880 Cypress Replacement Project: Blocks 27, 28, and 31*, edited by Mary Praetzelis, pp. 50-107, 2001, prepared for the California Department of Transportation (hereafter referred to as Block 27 BTR). The 1880 U.S. Census listed 18-year-old Ellen as a dressmaker; see DRT, pp. 53-55. Silk and woolen clothing, buttons, jewelry, a purse, and numerous items of footwear—including a pair of fashionable women's high-laced shoes—were recovered from Privy 2822; see Feature Summary and Artifact Descriptive List, pp. 69-72 and 75-80 in the Block 27 BTR.

7. The Mann family is discussed in many sections of this report and in *Block Technical Report: Historical Archaeology I-880 Cypress Replacement Project: Block 1*, edited by Mary Praetzelis, pp. 33-63, 2001, prepared for the California Department of Transportation (hereafter referred to as Block 1 BTR). Women's silk clothing, buttons, jewelry, hair accessories, bone fans, corset fasteners, shoes, slippers, and a sewing-machine-oil bottle were recovered from Privy 900 associated with the Mann family. These items are described in the Feature Summary and listed on the Artifact Descriptive List, pp. 39-41 and 45-52 of the Block 1 BTR.
Sources for "Out for a Stroll": (continued)

8. The household of Lucinda Tilghman and Abraham Holland was just a few doors down from the Mann family on Block 1. Their collection was remarkable for the number of gold items. These are described in the Feature Summary and listed on the Artifact Descriptive List, pp. 85-86 and 90-95 of the Block 1 BTR. Some of their items are pictured in Figure 3.9.

9. The Barry family lived in a small residence divided into flats on Linden Street. Their privy is discussed in Block Technical Report: Historical Archaeology I-880 Cypress Replacement Project: Blocks 4, 5, 6, and 9, edited by Mary Praetzellis and Suzanne B. Stewart, pp. 415-440, 2001, prepared for the California Department of Transportation (hereafter referred to as Block 6 BTR). Men’s and women’s clothing, buttons, jewelry, eyeglasses, and a corset fastener were recovered; these are described in the Feature Summary and listed on the Artifact Descriptive List, pp. 419-420 and 425-431 of the Block 6 BTR.

10. Historical photographs, such as the accompanying one of Shellmound Park in nearby Emeryville, are a good source for tracing changing fashions. See Joan Severa, Dressed for the Photographer: Ordinary Americans and Fashion, 1840-1900, 1995.

11. Jack London had an excellent eye for detail, including women’s fashions. His young heroine, Saxon, knew how to dress for her nights out and how to attract the attention of the man she fancied: she bought another pair of silk stockings and made a new dress. Saxon’s troubles with her sister-in-law over her extravagances are covered in the first 10 chapters of The Valley of the Moon, 1913.

12. Archaeologists also excavated a well associated with the Pullman Hotel at 1802-1808 Seventh Street; these data are presented in Block Technical Report: Historical Archaeology I-880 Cypress Replacement Project: Blocks 22, 24, and 29, edited by Mary Praetzellis and Suzanne B. Stewart, 2001, prepared for the California Department of Transportation (hereafter referred to as Block 24 BTR). The Pullman Hotel is discussed on pp. 93-126 of the Block 24 BTR. Although both the Railroad Exchange and Pullman Hotel were among the better and probably more expensive of the third-rank hotels in West Oakland, according to the categories developed by Paul Groth (1994), the Railroad Exchange generally appears the more upscale of the two.
REBEKAH-AT-THE-WELL: A 19TH-CENTURY ICON

Toni F. Douglass

The age-old, biblical story of Rebekah at the well describes the quest of Abraham’s servant for a proper wife for Isaac, his master’s son. The mission leads him to a distant village, where Rebekah offers to draw water both for the servant and his camels. This gesture is the sign he has been looking for, and the beautiful girl is instantly chosen to be Isaac’s wife. Her hospitality is surely the reason that the image of Rebekah became so common on 19th-century ceramic wares, particularly on Rockingham-glazed teapots. By the mid-1800s, these items were being made in the tens of thousands by several pottery companies in the eastern states and may have been “the most popular piece of American pottery ever made” (Gross, Pastron, and Garaventa 1981:480-483; Stradling 1997:334).

Rockingham-glazed pottery is a “pale yellow or cream-colored earthenware covered with variegated purple-brown, brown, or yellow-brown glaze” (Praetzellis and Praetzellis 1980:14). It was first made in America in 1824 by David Henderson and George Dummer, who gave new life to the obsolete Jersey Porcelain and Pottery Works in Jersey City, renaming it the American Pottery Manufacturing Company. After four years, the partnership ended in failure and Dummer sold his share to Henderson who, joined by his brother, proceeded to “plant the seeds of modern pottery in America” (Leibowitz 1985:27). Indeed, the Hendersons’ introduction of moldmade ceramics was responsible for its transition from a cottage industry to a fully industrial production. With help from some of England’s best pottery craftsmen, Hendersons’ company produced the first yellowware and what has become known as Rockingham ware in America.

To Victorian America, the Rebekah-at-the-Well teapot was a familiar, cozy, and informal item. Its place was deep in the private center of domestic sacred space, the kitchen, itself the heart of the Victorian home. The large number of these pots found archaeologically in West Oakland demonstrates the popularity of informal tea drinking. Of the 26 contexts where these items were found, most were associated with Anglo-Americans; some were linked with households from Canada, Ireland, Scotland, Germany, and England, while two of the four African American households had also used these vessels. Many of these people worked for the railroad, including laborers, conductors, porters, a brakeman, and a fireman. Others were carpenters, a housepainter, a carpetlayer, a plumber, a paperhanger, a butcher, a bridgebuilder, a cooper, and a dressmaker. That this group of people were so occupationally diverse shows that the Rebekah-at-the-Well teapot was an icon of both Christian respectability and hospitality that crossed most class and ethnic boundaries.

Rebekah-at-the-Well teapots. Found in more than one-quarter of the excavated deposits in West Oakland, among households with a range of ethnic/national ties and varied occupations, the Rebekah-at-the-Well teapots were one of the most popular pieces of pottery in the mid-19th century.
HOPE IN A MEDICINE BOTTLE

Maria LaCalle

Tuberculosis, or consumption as it was popularly known, was one of the most dreaded
diseases of the 19th century, being responsible for one out of every five deaths from 1800 through
1870. During the late 19th century, death rates were reduced due to medical advances and
increasing public-health measures; fear of tuberculosis increased, however, as it became
understood that the disease was infectious. The frightful symptoms of tuberculosis provided
fuel for concern, as the unfortunate victim experienced a persistent cough—often bringing up
blood, fever, night sweats, and severe loss of appetite. Consumption flourished amid the dense
living-quarters of 19th-century American cities.

Mirroring the larger national problem, tuberculosis was the leading cause of death in late-
19th-century Oakland, replaced only in the late 1890s by heart disease (Oakland Health
Department 1916). Although Oakland had lower rates (1.7 per 1,000 in 1896) than other urban
centers such as New York (3.06) or Paris (5.0) (Oakland Health Department 1897), City public-
health officials considered their rates to be artificially high, for “we always have in our midst a
large number of consumptives from San Francisco and other places, who have been drawn
here by the mildness of our climate” (Oakland Health Department 1881:45).

German physician, Robert Koch, isolated the bacilli Mycobacterium tuberculosis in 1882.
This discovery resulted in gradual acceptance by the medical profession that tuberculosis was
not due to a hereditary predisposition, as was previously thought, but was a contagious condition
that could be spread via human contact. The consequences of this discovery on medical science
and public-health policy were not immediate. Physicians continued to contest the contagious
nature of tuberculosis. This professional debate affected the advice that patients received. While
physicians still had no effective treatment, efforts were made to improve sanitation and nutrition.
Focus was placed on reducing the spread of disease and strengthening the body’s ability to
defend itself against the infection. The combination of increasing numbers of consumptives
and professional debate over the infectious nature of the disease created an ideal environment
for patent-medicine entrepreneurs to peddle their putative “cures.”

Dr. Dunn, Oakland Health Officer, reported in 1897 that in the past the causes of tuberculosis
remained unknown and few measures had been adopted to halt the spread of tuberculosis.

Now, however, we know that a bacillus of well known characteristics is
always responsible for the disease, that it is always carried by certain
vehicles, viz: the sputum, meat and milk and that it infects those whose
systems have been brought below par, most frequently by living in illy
ventilated, damp or filthy apartments, that have not been sufficiently
exposed to sunlight . . . Science has, with tireless patience and sacrifice
studied and finally discovered the means whereby we can become the
conquerors in this formerly apparently hopeless fight with tuberculosis
[Oakland Board of Health 1897: 5-6].

Dr. Dunn recommended that tuberculosis be placed on the list of contagious diseases, that
patient’s quarters be disinfected, that milk be tested, that only federally inspected meat be sold, and
that spitting in public places be forbidden.

Although the gradual scientific acceptance of germ theory in the late 19th century improved
society’s ability to prevent tuberculosis, progress was slow in its treatment. Despite the claims of
numerous patent medicines, there was no cure. However, significant gains had been made in extending
the patient’s life. “It is not uncommon,” wrote Dr. Austin Flint, a prominent figure in medical education, “to meet with instances of considerable deposit tubercle remaining quiescent or progressing very slowly and the patient able to engage in the active occupations and enjoyments of life” (Brieger 1972:142). At the same time, medical progress was opening up a new market for so-called “consumption cures,” which universally promised patients a speedy recovery. The patent-medicine business encouraged the public to bypass physicians and treat their ailments themselves (Figure 3.8). Self-medication became a big and extremely profitable business for these entrepreneurs.

In his book Health and Disease, Oakland surgeon Dr. C.G.R. Moutoux expressed concern regarding the vulnerability of these patients and the dubious industry that formed in order to profit from their misfortunes:

> From the time when consumption began increasing in severity, as well as in numbers of victims, many special methods have been proposed and practiced; but, after the test of experience, have been abandoned. And this will perhaps be the fate of others yet to be advanced as sure cures. But I fear that not only disappointment on the part of patients, but injurious effects on their organisms, will be the sad result—out of all proportion to the real benefits [1905:169].

Journalist Samuel Hopkins Adams infamously opposed the burgeoning patent-medicine industry. In his 1905 series in Collier’s Weekly, “The Great American Fraud,” Adams analyzed the ingredients of many of the best-selling patent medicines of the time. He reported that these companies made false claims and more importantly that, in fact, the ingredients in these nostrums often harmed those taking them. Adams’ articles single-handedly delivered a massive blow to the credibility of the industry, and ultimately led to legislative action the following year.

Several consumption “cures” were found among the numerous patent-medicine bottles excavated on the Cypress Archaeological Project. A deposit at 881 Cedar Street, home of the O’Brien family, contained the best example of self-medication among tuberculosis patients. Railroad engineer Michael O’Brien died of tuberculosis while living here in May of 1900. During his 19 months of illness, he used several proprietary medicines to ease pain and in the hopes of curing his affliction. He took cathartics—Pitcher’s Castoria, Citrate of Magnesia, and Ayer’s Pills—possibly to counteract the constipating side effects of the morphine, as well as general cure-alls: Kelly’s Bitters, Jamaica Ginger, Joy’s Sarsaparilla, and Jayne’s Tonic Vermifuge. Shiloh’s Consumption Cure seems, however, to have been Mr. O’Brien’s proprietary medicine of choice (Figure 3.9).

Michael O’Brien’s untimely death may well be testament enough as to the effectiveness of this supposed cure. Just five years after his demise, Samuel H. Adams wrote bitingly of Shiloh’s
money-back guarantee: “if I were a consumptive, after I had taken ‘Shiloh’ for awhile I should be less interested in recovering my money than in getting back my wasted chance at life” (1905:48). In the case of Mr. O’Brien, a money-back guarantee seems painfully ironic. While Mr. O’Brien may have received some relief from Shiloh’s, several of the ingredients posed as great a threat to his health as did tuberculosis.

While the chloroform in Shiloh’s Cure would have quelled O’Brien’s nagging cough, it would have also hindered his body’s way of expelling excess mucus. By the same token, as the opiates in Shiloh’s would have made him more comfortable, they un-doubtedly hastened his death by weakening his body’s ability to defend itself.

Like many patent medicines of the time, Shiloh’s contained “natural,” “herbal” ingredients that had been traditionally used as folk remedies to treat similar conditions. Shiloh’s contained three of these seemingly benign ingredients: peppermint, licorice, and lobelia. Lobelia has an effect similar to tobacco on the nervous system. It also can produce serious side effects if taken in too large a dose, including profuse sweating, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, tremors, rapid heartbeat, mental confusion, convulsions, hypothermia, coma, and even death. The licorice in Shiloh’s was used as an expectorant, offsetting the chloroform, and helping to remove mucus from the lungs.

Among the most dubious of all ingredients in Shiloh’s Consumption Cure was hydrocyanic acid. Used to allay the cough, it was also an exceptionally poisonous chemical that could be fatal at a high dose.
The Franks’ Guilty Secret – Allan’s Anti-Fat!

Erica Gibson

Allan’s Anti-Fat. Remedies for a variety of other ailments or conditions, were part of the patent-medicine armory. Among the targets were obesity, which was purportedly cured using Allan’s Anti-Fat.

Annie Frank felt tired; it was Wednesday, cleaning day, and when she had taken the lamps down from the front room wall to clean them, she had dropped one of the chimneys. Tiny glass shards flew everywhere and Annie had spent quite a bit of time—most of it down on her hands and knees—trying to get them all. Struggling to get up from that awkward position just served to remind her that both she and her husband, Charles (who worked as a barkeeper, bottler, and brewery agent), needed to lose some weight [1].

Born and raised in Germany, Charles and Annie had a fondness for their native foods, especially sausages: bauerwurst, blutwurst, pinkelwurst, and Charles’ favorite weisswurst. While they still ate the traditional light evening meal—Abendbrot, or ’evening bread,’—they indulged heavily in the beers and ales that Charles was able to bring home from work. And of course, a meal wouldn’t be a meal without a little something sweet at the end [2].

Annie felt comfortable about her weight when she and Charles had first bought the house at 818 Magnolia Street in 1877. At that time, Lillian Russell was just becoming popular, and her voluptuous figure mimicked Annie’s. Indeed, Lillian Russell was so celebrated that the deep red American Beauty rose had been named after her. Lately though, more slender women had become the rage. First there had been that Lillie Langtry woman, who caught the Prince of Wales’ eye and became his mistress. When their affair ended, Lillie came to the United States and took up acting. Tall, with a large bosom and hips just like Annie, Lillie was given to morning exercise and long walks of several miles which resulted in a much more slender physique [3]. More recently, Annie had seen pictures of the new national ideal, the Gibson Girl, who was positively skinny!

Resolving that something had to be done, Annie decided to lose weight. And if she was going to lose weight, so was Charles. Morning or evening walks would be a start, but Annie knew she would never get her husband to give up his beloved beer and sausage. She would just have to find another way. Just yesterday, while skimming some periodicals, Annie found an advertisement for Allan’s Anti-Fat. Would this be the answer? The advertisement stated with convincing authority that, “Allan’s Anti-Fat is the great remedy for Corupulency. It is purely vegetable and perfectly harmless. It acts on the food in the stomach preventing its conversion into fat. Taken according to directions, it will reduce a fat person from 2 to 5 pounds a week” [4].

The very next day Annie went for a long walk, straight to the drugstore. There she made her first purchase of Allan’s Anti-Fat. At $1.56 for a 6.5-ounce bottle, it was expensive, but Annie felt the price was worth it—if it worked.

Unbeknownst to Annie, most of Allan’s Anti-Fat was water, along with smaller amounts of potassium iodide, salicylic acid, glycerin, and extract of bladderwrack. This latter ingredient was actually seaweed, a popular obesity cure of the day [5]. While the success of Annie’s efforts at reducing are not known, she obviously kept trying as a total of 13 bottles of Allan’s Anti-Fat patent medicine were recovered from the family’s backyard privy.
Sources for "The Frank's Guilty Secret":

1. A privy associated with the Frank family was excavated on Cypress Block 9; these data are presented in Block Technical Report: Historical Archaeology I-880 Cypress Replacement Project: Blocks 4, 5, 6, and 9, edited by Mary Praetzellis and Suzanne B. Stewart, pp. 447-459, 2001, prepared for the California Department of Transportation (hereafter referred to as Block 9 BTR). Their privy was remarkable for the presence of 13 bottles of Allan's Anti-Fat, along with numerous root beer bottles, as well as beer and other alcoholic-beverage bottles, and a shattered chimney lamp. These are described in the Feature Summary and listed on the Artifact Descriptive List, pp. 451 and 455-456 of the Block 9 BTR. We don't know whether Annie or Charles Frank purchased the Anti-Fat, we cast Annie in that role because women who kept house full-time were frequently the primary shoppers of the family. This “story” demonstrates the power of advertising (see also Chapter 4, Mullins).

2. The Frank privy did not contain a large enough sample of faunal remains for analysis, and the German foods listed here—processed meats and bread—would not have left archaeological evidence. For the purposes of this “story,” we have assumed that the Franks enjoyed traditional German cooking.


4. The advertisement for Allan's Anti-Fat comes from the standard bottle reference: Bill and Betty Wilson, 19th Century Medicine in Glass, 1971, p. 16.

5. Dr. Arthur Cramp has written extensively on hoaxes perpetuated on the unwitting consumer by patent-medicine retailers. He discusses Allan's Anti-Fat on p. 686 of Nostrums and Quackery, 1921.

(continued on page 72)
BECOMING JEWISH AMERICANS
Adrian Praetzellis

We will probably never know whether the artifacts from Privy 1409 at 712 Fifth Street came from the family of Isaac Barnett, Samuel Jacobs, or a combination of the two. Both of these households, however, were made up of German/Polish Jews who made their living peddling fruit. Ever the first sociologist coined the term “assimilation,” the process of replacing old ways with new was known in Yiddish as *ausgrenzen*—and the practice embraced with zeal. The archaeological remains in the Barnett/Jacobs privy speak of this process and how California Jews participated in it.

### The Golden Land

To immigrant eastern European Jews, America was *die goldeneh medina,* “the golden land,” where anything was possible. Although its entry fee—the abandonment of much traditional culture—was high, many people were more than happy to pay the price. To an ambitious immigrant, the *gruenehheim,* or greenhorn, was the most pitiful of creatures. Conspicuous by his old-country dress and manner, this character was anathema to his co-religionists, an embarrassment that represented everything they had enthusiastically abandoned in Europe. Before Peddling Fruit: A Family Business

Samuel Jacobs immigrated in 1879. The 1880 Population Census finds him living as a boarder in the home of Julia and Jacob Glassman (also a German peddler) in San Francisco. Peddler was a common occupation among new Jewish immigrants. Even the poorest could afford the rent of a cart by the day, either selling their goods door to door or, more likely for fruit sellers like Jacobs, setting up in a street market. It may be that Jacob Glassman was a landsman—someone from the Jacobs’ home district—who established

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Birth Year</th>
<th>Nativity</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td><em>Barnett,</em> Isaac</td>
<td>1848</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>Fruit peddler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>unknown (wife)</em></td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Jennie (dau)</em></td>
<td>1875</td>
<td>Cal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Mark (son)</em></td>
<td>1876</td>
<td>Cal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Beatrice (dau)</em></td>
<td>1882</td>
<td>Cal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Mary (dau)</em></td>
<td>1886</td>
<td>Cal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Harry (son)</em></td>
<td>1884</td>
<td>Cal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Bert (son)</em></td>
<td>1884</td>
<td>Cal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Bertie (dau)</em></td>
<td>1886</td>
<td>Cal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td><em>Barnett,</em> David (bro)</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Fruit dealer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td><em>Jacobs,</em> Samuel</td>
<td>1845</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Fruit peddler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Rebecca (wife)</em></td>
<td>1842</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Data derived from city directories, leases, and U.S. Population Census.
2 It is likely that Jacobs was from Posnan.
the latter in the peddler’s trade. By 1887 Jacobs had set up on his own and leased the house at 712 Fifth Street, where he and his wife, Rebecca, lived until the mid-1890s. In 1890 Samuel’s brother Isaac—yet another fruit peddler—and his family had bought a home at 762 Fifth Street, on an adjacent block, and lived there for more than 30 years.

The census lists the birthplace of Isaac and Rebecca Jacobs variously as Germany and (after WWI) as Poland, and notes that both spoke Yiddish and Russian. It is likely that the family originated in the German state of Posnan, whose Jewish residents were commonly fluent in Polish, Russian, or German, as well as Yiddish, which was spoken in the home.

Samuel Jacobs had taken over the house at 712 Fifth Street from Isaac Barnett, a Polish-born fruit peddler who had lived there with his wife, six children, and his brother David (who was also in the fruit business), from the early 1880s. Sadly, Bear and Harry, the family’s infant twin sons, died of jaundice on successive days in December 1884. The boys’ names suggest their Jewish origins, for Bear is the English translation of the Hebrew name Dov and even the very English-sounding Harry was a common homonym of the Hebrew name Hayim that a later generation would change to Hyman (Rottenburg 1977). The family name Barnett is also a common adaptation of Dov (Blatt 1998).

**Archaeology of a Jewish Household**

Paradoxically, most of the artifacts that now represent the families are household objects that would probably have been chosen and purchased by those who figure the least in the documentary record—the women. Exceptions to this may be the carriage parts, probably from the wagon that was kept in the backyard shed; the seeds of 10 fruit and vegetable species, an unusually wide range, may also reflect the fruit vendor’s trade. Other artifacts, such as the 104 British ale bottles, suggest the idiosyncrasies of one member of the household or another. That six different manufacturers were represented may indicate an accumulation over time.

These items either fit in with what we know of the family from historic records or suggest their personal habits. Other discoveries, however, suggest their cultural trajectory and, through this household, speak of people of similar backgrounds and futures.

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**Meat that’s Fit to Eat**

Within the system of Jewish dietary laws known as *kashrus*, ritually acceptable food is said to be kosher; all other is *treife* and not to be eaten. Among the prohibitions of *kashrus* are those against the consumption of certain mammals, such as pig and rabbit, as well as fishes that lack scales and fins, all shellfish, and animals not ritually slaughtered. In addition, the hindquarters of otherwise acceptable mammals must be purged of the *gid ha-nasheh*, the sciatic nerve, to make them kosher. This technically difficult procedure, known as *traibering*, was rarely done; rather, the kosher butcher usually sold the hindquarters of cattle and sheep to non-kosher shops. Thus, hindquarters were effectively *treife* (Donin 1972:116).

---

| Meat and Shellfish Remains from Privy 1409 – Barnett/Jacobs Households |
|---|---|---|
| **SHELLFISH** | Frags | Hinges |
| Eastern oyster | ? | |
| Pacific Calico scallop | 42 | |
| **FOOD BONE** | | |
| **Meat Weight (lbs.)** | | |
| Beef | 104.0 | |
| Mutton | 76.6 | |
| Pork | 37.2 | |
| **TOTAL** | 217.8 lbs. | |
| **HINDQUARTER ONLY** | | |
| (Beef/Mutton) | | |
| **Meat Weight (lbs.)** | | |
| Round | 104 | |
| Rump | 28.2 | |
| Hindshank | 8.1/1.5 | |
| **TOTAL** | 46.7/1.5 lbs. | |

*Several fragments; number of hinges cannot be determined.*
The table below shows that the remains of two species of shellfish were found among the refuse in Privy 1409. Furthermore, nearly 40 percent of the meat represented (85.4 of 217.8 pounds) was either from a treyfe species or cut from the hindquarters.

It would be difficult to overemphasize the significance of maintaining a kosher home to a family of traditional Jews (Ganzfried 1996). More than merely a tradition, the practice was and is considered a mitzvah, a commandment from God. It was not optional. Today, as in the past, maintaining kashrus has the effect of socially segregating the group, for a traditionally observant Jew could not accept an invitation to eat at the non-kosher home of a friend and business lunches were effectively impossible. While some gentiles understood the situation, others interpreted the practice as arrogance and used it as fuel for the anti-Jewish sentiment of the era. A mechanism for social cohesion within the group, kashrus was also a barrier to advancement and the mark of a griereheim.

Thus, the Barnett/Jacobs families would have found themselves confronted with several choices: the culturally conservative course would have been to remain true to the practices of their forebears, buying their food from kosher sources. Alternatively, they might have obtained meat from non-kosher butchers but avoided treyfe species. Or the family could have taken the most extreme course and abandoned kashrus altogether—and this is what archaeological evidence shows they did.

It is revealing to compare the proportion of the three major meat types between the Barnett/Jacobs household and the mean of all other households of the same economic level (skilled working class) in the Cypress Project sample. The similarity is startling, with the Jewish family consuming even more pork than the mean skilled working-class household. From a strictly religious perspective, the consumption of pork was no worse than eating, for example, non-kosher beef hindquarters. Yet it would have had greater symbolic significance because of the particular abhorrence in which the pig is held in Eastern European Jewish folk belief, as well as the medieval practice of force-feeding pork to Jews who refused conversion to Catholicism.

Constriction and Freedom

A corset fastener is a small thing. To find such an object would not be of much note in most archaeological contexts of the period. Here it is different, because this tiny item represents the unnamed woman of this household and the role she took in the process of cultural change.

For centuries, eastern European village communities had been ruled by traditional socio-religious strictures that stipulated a style of women’s clothing and gave limited range for the expression for either fashion or individual taste. For the sake of modesty, married women were expected to conceal their hair under a sheitel, or wig, while the female form was concealed behind shawls, voluminous skirts, and straight-cut dresses. In late-19th-century America, however, the ideal female body type was hourglass-shaped, rounded above and below with a wasp-like waist (Scherier 1995). It was a sculpted look could only be achieved by that science of bodily engineering known as corsetry (see also Chapter 6).

To modern sensibilities, the physical constriction of the corset makes this garment a fitting metaphor for the ‘tight-laced’ Victorian culture of which it was a part. But what did it mean for the woman at 712 Fifth Street, most likely a recent immigrant from an eastern European village, to wear a corset in the 1880s?

It would have been no small matter that clothing no longer marked her ethnicity. Coming from a larger environment in which to be visibly Jewish was to invite ridicule or worse, American clothing offered anonymity. Although the garment was widely used by urban middle-class
Europeans, to women in eastern European Jewish villages, the corset was a uniquely American artifact. While physically constraining, the corset was psychologically and culturally liberating. It represented style and, upon immigration, the elevated status that one could achieve by the apt use of the symbols of fashion; for it showed that the wearer was no grueneheim, but a sophisticated American (Scherier 1995:64).

By 1900 Samuel and Rebecca Jacobs lived in San Francisco with their 14-year-old niece, Gertie, a “tailoress.” Isaac Barnett’s young daughters May (17) and Bertie (13) were “at school,” while 25-year-old Jennie was keeping house. For working-class Jewish girls of the era, Gertie’s path to employment in the needle trades was more common than the place of May and Bertie. Traditional practice would have seen a 25-year-old long married and the elder, or even both, of her sisters at work. While girls’ education was not thought worthwhile by many of the Barnett’s background, this was yet another way in which the family demonstrated their modern, American values.

Peddlers on the Road to Assimilation

An archaeology based on a single deposit from one household provides a glimpse of a moment seemingly frozen in time. We can project the family’s experience based on what we know of their background and see how the immigrant generation adapted to the circumstances of their new home, but we do not know how the story played out in succeeding generations (cf., Silverstein 1994). In a sense, one’s appetite for information is increased rather than satiated.

Education, clothing, food, language, and personal names—each a seemingly mundane aspect of culture that would nonetheless have had enormous symbolic significance to this immigrant family. Decisions about these small but ultimately defining aspects of life were made at the household level. Though fragmentary and ambiguous, the archaeology of families is a uniquely evocative source of prima facie evidence of the outcome of the many day-to-day negotiations of which 19th-century culture was composed.

If the general process and trajectory of assimilative cultural change seem clear, the mechanisms by which it occurred are not so well understood. There is a great deal to be learned about the everyday practices that either reinforced these changes or worked to counter them.

A family of immigrant Jews, circa 1900. Jacob Peter and Esther Cohen (Adrian Praetzellis’ maternal grandparents) fled the Ukraine and Poland, respectively, in the late 19th century to escape the pogroms of their native countries. While tradition required a beard for men and a wig for married women, Jacob’s sporty mustache and Esther’s natural hair show the couple’s desire to blend into their new country. It is exceedingly unlikely that this tailor’s children would ever have played the middle-class games suggested by the photographer’s props they hold. (Photo courtesy Adrian Praetzellis)
Hope but no Cure in Oakland

Like Americans all over the country, Oakland residents feared falling victim to consumption and used what was available in the battle against this dreaded disease. While Oakland health officials tried to control outbreaks of tuberculosis, progress was slow. Physicians had little more to offer the consumption patient. Instructions to maintain a “wholesome diet” and “exercise in the fresh air” (Faulkner and Carmichel 1892:129) must have offered little comfort to the patients battling for their lives. The patent medicine industry’s “consumption cures” offered hope in an otherwise dismal prognosis. Its profiteering on the desperation of tuberculosis patients is certainly one of the most massive public frauds ever carried out in the United States.

It may be overly simplistic to state that patent “cures” offered no real benefit to their consumers. Aside from their analgesic qualities, consumption medicines also offered the power of suggestion—and a patient who truly believes that their medicine is an all-powerful serum will often experience temporary improvement. This effect, combined with the many remissions that tuberculosis patients naturally experience, made for a perfect disease from which “cure” manufactures could profit (Cramp 1921).

We can never know what Michael O’Brien experienced. More than likely in his 19 months of sickness, Mr. O’Brien did undergo the fluctuations of tuberculosis, and perhaps attributed these periods of improvement to Shiloh’s Cure. While duped, Mr. O’Brien may have gained a sense of control. If his ultimate fate was not changed through his ingestion of Shiloh’s, the nostrum appears to have offered temporary relief and a glimmer of hope.

Health and Nutrition

Adrian Praetzellis

One of the few unequivocal ways in which we can measure material well-being is in the area of health and nutrition. One can ask, what did this population eat and how did their diet compare with that of their contemporaries? Part of the answer lies in the material description of life at the time. Documents show what was available, but what were people of various economic levels and ethnicities actually doing? And how does their behavior compare with that of their contemporaries elsewhere and at earlier periods?

Novelist and social critic Jack London was a passionate writer whose 1903 account of the terrible conditions of the English poor, The People of the Abyss, is credited with having a similar level of influence on attitudes toward poverty in the early 20th century as did the works of Charles Dickens, which transformed British public opinion 50 years earlier. The poverty of his boyhood neighborhood of West Oakland was a constant theme in London’s writings and the genesis of his brand of enthusiastic—if idiosyncratic—socialism. Although contemporary accounts and government reports support much of what London had to say, he told only part of the story of West Oakland, for many working-class people may have found their standard of living to be relatively high.

The rise of trade unionism and class-consciousness were important outcomes of late 19th-century industrialization. Although rapid cycles of economic boom and depression created unstable labor conditions in the West, Oakland’s railroad workers were protected from the worst of these fluctuations by the very size of their employer. Unionism was strong. By 1900 railroad workers were both the most heavily unionized and best paid in the country (U.S. Department of Commerce 1975:166-168).
It was paradoxical, felt London, that the availability of consumer goods and plentiful high-quality food thwarted the movement toward structural change and a socialist economy—revolution—by creating what Lenin called an “aristocracy of labor.” The transient underclass is represented neither in primary historic sources nor the archaeological record. Regardless of one’s view of London’s political agenda, it is possible to investigate food and nutrition among West Oakland’s working class and see how the archaeological evidence compares to the assertions of contemporary social reformers (see also Chapter 7, Walker).

Reconstructing the late-19th-century diet using documentary sources alone is fraught with problems. Cookbooks and guides are prescriptive, indicating what the authors believed people should eat. The historic interview-based official report is as likely as its modern counterpart to be ridden with misrepresentations, “a sad catalog of self-delusion” (Rathje and Murphy 1992:71) rather than the objective chronicle it purports to be.

Although the diet itself provides valuable information about nutrition, its composition and preparation were influenced by the economic condition and culture of subpopulations, which are themselves important areas of investigation. Simplistic economic modeling might lead one to conclude that households purchase at the highest level of their ability (the poor and the wealthy eat the cheapest and the most expensive foods, respectively). These kinds of taken-for-granted notions are eminently worthy of empirical testing, since between the ability to purchase a commodity and desire to do so sits the multi-layered filter known as culture. As a result, archaeological findings are frequently counter-intuitive: modern garbage studies, for example, have concluded that the wastage of a type of food actually increases as it becomes rarer; and although, pound for pound, candy is one of the most expensive foods, poor people in Mexico City eat more of it than their affluent neighbors (Rathje and Murphy 1992).

Food is more than merely a nutrition delivery system: to various populations in 19th-century Oakland, it had ethnic, class, ideological, and even political significance. The massive influx of immigrants in the mid-and-late 19th century engendered a curious mixture of nativism, fear, and—in the Domestic Reform movement—the desire to improve the standard of living of these newcomers by the rationalization of housework (Figure 3.10). Although the latter is credited with having a profound effect on the trajectory of America culture and social life, its sway over the material culture of the home seems to have been minor (see Chapter 6, Gutman). Thus, we can speculate that the movement’s homogenizing influence may have been similarly ineffective on the patchwork of cultures that made up West Oakland. This chapter emphasizes that archaeology can contribute prima facie evidence to the discussion by examining and comparing the consumer choices of West Oaklanders—especially immigrant and non-white households—in the realm of food.

**The Meaning of Meat**

Historians have long recognized general correspondence between a household’s expenditure on meat and its relative wealth/social class. “People ate,” wrote nutritionist H.J. Teuteberg, “according to the estate into which they were born” (1975:71). As analysts of material remains, historical archaeologists have taken up the study. However, while the correlation between wealth and the quality of meat purchased is often relatively clear in institutional settings (e.g., Schulz and Gust 1983), it is less so in domestic ones (e.g., Henry 1987). The remains of expensive meat cuts cannot be taken as an unambiguous marker of either wealth or elevated social position.
Mary Maniery’s (2002) study of a California labor camp, for example, concluded that 40 percent of the meat eaten by the workers could be classed as expensive. These results surely reflect the 6,000-calories-per-day diet needed to maintain the laborers’ demanding work, but functionalist explanations may not always be in order.

The counter-intuitive character of archaeological findings relating to diet is frequently one of their most important contributions. Considering the problem of representativeness (or the lack thereof) of the archaeological record, what can be said about the diet of West Oaklanders?

A great deal is known about food in 19th-century America. Reliable government statistics have been collected for more than 150 years (e.g., U.S. Department of Commerce 1975) and detailed studies of the diets of a variety of households are available; the supply of books and articles on the subject shows no sign of abating. Such a superfluity of scholarly scribbling might be thought to preclude the possibility of important new insights. Yet, archaeology on a household scale makes a contribution that complements, qualifies, and deepens the revelations of those scholars whose data derive from the printed page. The existing historic record has problems that cannot be solved by analysis: problems of scale, representativeness, and accuracy.

Official statistics document the import, production, and sale of almost every conceivable commodity; yet the scale is such that one cannot apply the data to particular populations in specific places and times. Household diet studies list the foods consumed daily by representative households of various social classes and ethnicities in the 1890s. Presented as models of objective science, they are ideals; for, as Bill Rathje’s Garbage Project has repeatedly shown, people are less than candid when reporting what they consume (Rathje and Murphy 1992).
With anecdotal accounts on one end of the spectrum and statistical conglomeration on the other, archaeology is in an ideal position to fill the gap with empirical data available from no other source. Archaeology can also bring to bear an anthropological perspective that views food as material culture. Through it, we can both document what discrete populations actually did and put this information into its cultural and historical context—seeing how the class of artifact called ‘food’ operated in the society of the era—to address the central question:

What did meat mean?

The Archaeological Food-Bone Data

Our archaeological research design posed questions about consumer behavior among the various ethnic and economic groups who lived in West Oakland. The study of these questions was seen as an opportunity to

• examine the eating habits of these populations,

• investigate the degree to which the latter were affected by economic and cultural factors, and

• test the notion that class/wealth and ethnicity determined what people purchased.

While historical archaeologists have examined the archaeological manifestations of class and ethnicity for some time, most analysis has been done on a small scale, comparing one household to another. The Cypress Project, however, allows a whole new level of analysis due to

• the large number of collections discovered,

• the methodological uniformity of excavation and analysis of these collections, and

• the reliability of the historical associations for each collection, which has enabled researchers to link materials with documented households.

Taken together, these qualities create what may be an unprecedented degree of control over this type and quantity of archaeological data, making it useful to apply statistical analyses not attempted heretofore (Figure 3.11). Furthermore, the relatively large number of collections involved allows us to examine two of the models that archaeologists commonly use to interpret their data: first, the assumption that consumer purchasing patterns follow a model of economic rationality whereby wealthier households purchase more expensive commodities than poorer ones; and second, that

Figure 3.11. A grand collection. Nearly 2,000 pounds of meat are represented by the bones in Well 7511, associated with the 1890s households of Southern Pacific workers, mostly African American Pullman Car porters. While this one is clearly exceptional, many of the Cypress Project faunal assemblages are robust, allowing a variety of statistical studies.
### Table 3.1. Archaeological Features with Faunal Remains and the Households that Created them

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Block</th>
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<th>Date (ca.)</th>
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Table 3.1. Faunal Remains (continued)

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<td>1895</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>IWC</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Well 2007</td>
<td>Lawrence and Ward families</td>
<td>1900</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>PVH</td>
<td>U.S./Eng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Pit 2404</td>
<td>Crocker family</td>
<td>1900</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>IWC</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Privy 4714</td>
<td>Gohsen family</td>
<td>1873</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>PVH</td>
<td>Ger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Privy 4724+</td>
<td>McNamara family</td>
<td>1878</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>IWC</td>
<td>Irish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Privy 4648</td>
<td>McNamara rental</td>
<td>1880</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>IWC</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Pit 2524</td>
<td>Unknown renter</td>
<td>1895</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>IWC</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Pit 2504</td>
<td>Crocker household</td>
<td>1895</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>IWC</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Privy 100</td>
<td>Huddleson household</td>
<td>1880</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>APH</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Privy 101</td>
<td>Stryker household</td>
<td>1881</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>APH</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Privy 141</td>
<td>O’Connell family</td>
<td>1878</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>IWC</td>
<td>Irish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Privy 156</td>
<td>Long family</td>
<td>1882</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Ger</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key:
Plus sign following feature number indicates additional contexts included (see Appendix C: Feature Associations by Block).
Date ca.= Estimated deposition date
Occupational Class: P = Professional; P+ = Wealthy Professional; S = Skilled Worker; U = Unskilled Worker.
Two types of residents, L = Landlady and W = Widow, could not generally be assigned to an occupational class.
House Type: APH = Almost Polite House; IWC = Informal Workers' Cottage; PVH = Polite Victorian House (see Appendix D for definitions).
O/E = Origin or Ethnicity; U.S. = U.S. white; AA = U.S. black; Ger = German; Scot = Scottish; J = Jewish; Can = Canadian; Eng = English; Ita = Italian.
(see Chapter 1 for further definitions)
foodways, long known as the most culturally conservative trait, reflect ethnicity/nativity and can be an indicator of cultural change.

In this essay, I examine the food-bone data for 68 archaeological features, combining and recombining the data according to the occupation/class, origin/ethnicity, neighborhood, the gender of the head of household, and the house type of the households that created them (Table 3.1). The goal of this analysis is to determine whether statistically significant patterns exist in the grouped data and, if so, which of these represent real behavioral differences between the groups and which are meaningless statistical artifacts, the result of differences in sample size or similar factors. Bruce Owen, whose comments form the basis of “By the Numbers,” performed the statistical analysis. The raw data, his methods, and report are reproduced as Appendix F.

By the Numbers: Neighborhoods and Meat

Our West Oakland study area was divided into three neighborhoods—West of Market, East of Market, and Oakland Point (see Figure 2.1)—divisions that would have been familiar to 19th-century Oaklanders. Market Street was seen as an important division: residents on the east side were perceived as oriented toward the cosmopolitan downtown core, whereas those on the west—including the well-known West of Market Boys—saw themselves as the “real” Oaklanders. To the west of Willow Street was Oakland Point: adjacent to the Southern Pacific Railroad yards, this was an area of small homes, residential hotels, and light industry.

Throughout the statistical studies, the Wilcoxon rank-sum test (also called the Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon test) was applied to compare the samples quantitatively in cases with two classes and the Kruskal-Wallis test, the equivalent for more than two classes. There is clear patterning by neighborhood in meat preference by species but none in the cost of meat purchased. The most evident pattern is in mutton, which has a significantly non-random distribution among the three neighborhoods (Figure 3.12). West of Market has significantly higher percentages of mutton than either the East of Market or Oakland Point. West of Market had a correspondingly lower percentage of beef than the others, although the pattern is significant only in comparison with the East of Market neighborhood at the 5 percent level. It seems that people in the West of Market neighborhood were substituting mutton for beef, relative to the others.

Figure 3.12. Kitchen butchering. A large number of the bone pieces in Cypress assemblages fit together, identifying them as the products of home butchering. In this sample from Well 7511, there are visible ax/cleaver marks, probably the result of reducing the cuts for preparation of soups and stews. Kitchen butchering was most common with mutton.

While it is tempting to conclude that the greater prevalence of mutton in the West of Market neighborhood is because this was an Irish district, the reality is not so clear. The West of Market sample does have a higher percentage of Irish units (35%) than the East of Market (26%) or Oakland Point (17%) neighborhoods, and while these differences are of the correct nature to explain the neighborhood species patterning, they are not large enough to do so.
Interestingly, there is no parallel pattern in the distribution of meat-cut costs. Although the percentages suggest that the Oakland Point neighborhood had generally less expensive cuts, the pattern is not statistically significant. In any case, it is not Oakland Point, but the West of Market neighborhood that stands out as different in species preference. It appears to be intermediate, not extreme, in cut costs. This all suggests that the neighborhood differences relate more to preferences than to economics.

By the Numbers: Gender

Is it possible to determine the influence of gender on meat purchases? Unfortunately, our results are difficult to interpret.

The population census and city-directory data indicate that some households were headed by women but did not always show which of the others were definitely headed by men, as opposed to being unknown or assumed. For this reason, we have used the clumsy woman/non-woman categories to distinguish between these households.

Five of the six woman-headed households were Irish (a pattern that is interesting in itself), and three of the six lived in Informal workers’ cottages. Since the small number of woman-headed households was so concentrated in certain subsets of the sample, we compared them to all the other residences, to the other Irish households, and to samples from the other Informal workers’ cottages. In this way, we hoped to be able to separate the effect of the head of household’s gender from that of their ethnicity or dwelling type.

Few statistically significant differences emerged. Woman-headed households appear to have had significantly more mutton and less pork than non-woman headed households, a pattern that holds at the 5 percent level of confidence. This might be due to the woman-headed households being Irish, and the Irish generally having more mutton (see the discussion below). Conversely, the apparent Irish preference for mutton might equally well result from the high number of woman-headed households in the Irish sample.

By the Numbers: Economics, Ethnicity, and Meat

Each of the samples was assigned to one of four economic/profession (e/p) categories based on the occupation of the head of the household: Unskilled, Skilled, Professional, Professional+. Each sample was also assigned according to the predominant ethnicity and/or nativity (e/n) of the household: US-born white American, African American, Irish, English, Scots, Italian, Jewish, and German.

The most surprising result is that samples representing the four household e/p categories do not relate as clearly or consistently as might be expected in relation to either meat species (beef, mutton, or pork) or meat-cut cost (high, medium, or low). If we consolidate the professions into “low status” (Skilled and Unskilled) and “high status” (Professional and Professional+), no significant differences in either meat species or cut cost, even at the 10 percent level, can be seen. Since Unskilled seems to be the lone genuinely distinctive category, and its distinctiveness is reduced by combining it with the Skilled sample in this scheme, this is not a surprising outcome. Wealthy (P+) households consumed more expensive meat than the two categories below them, but there is no linear relationship between wealth and cost of meat. Not only did Unskilled households not have the most economical cuts but, on the contrary, the percentage data suggest that they were more similar to the P+ category in their consumption of high-cost cuts.

There may be a weak pattern in the preference for pork: the percentage data suggest that it becomes more common as one progresses from lower to higher economic categories; this is
reflected in a difference at the 5 percent level between the U and P households, the latter showing more pork. With this exception, we can say with confidence that there are no clear differences in meat species utilized between the e/p categories.

The same data were examined by the ethnicity/nativity (e/n) of the households to distinguish differences in the meat consumption of these populations. Comparing U.S.-born whites to the other e/n categories revealed some differences: the former show less beef than African Americans and Germans at the 5 and 10 percent levels, respectively. When compared with a combination of all others, Irish households show a preference for mutton at the 10 percent level. Surprisingly, none of the e/n categories differ from each other at either the 5 or 10 percent confidence level in meat-cut cost (high, medium, or low). Thus, we can say with confidence that no single ethnicity/nativity group ate consistently more expensively or cheaply than any of the others.

While these differences between e/n categories are statistically significant, it would take the analysis of additional collections to determine if the pattern is behaviorally meaningful or an aberration. By the same token, to state that that there is no statistically significant difference between most of the categories that were examined is not the same as saying that the categories do not differ. It simply means that any difference that may exist is not great enough to be detected with confidence with the given sample size. Actual differences may be too subtle and obscured by individual variation to be picked up with confidence. Although as archaeological data go, these are highly controlled, overall patterns are more likely to reflect real differences and similarities than carefully chosen comparisons.

After the statistical tests that produced these results had been run, we scanned the raw percentages of high-, medium-, and low-cost meat remains between the e/p categories and noticed an interesting pattern: the meat purchases of the wealthiest households (P+) seemed to more closely resemble those of the poorest families (U). Similarly, the middling groups, S and P, resembled each other. To test this observation, data representing the two sets of e/p categories—U/P+ (n = 8) and S/P (n = 35), respectively—were combined and compared.

The combined U/P+ category was found to be quite different from the S/P, being composed of more medium-cost cuts—and, consequently, fewer high and low ones. The difference was significant at the 5 percent level with a probability of 0.0062, the smallest of any compared sets. By the same token, U/P+ households had more high-cost cuts than S/P, a probability of 0.0656. The fact that these patterns appear mostly in the medium-cost cuts, but not consistently in the high-cost cuts or at all in the low cost ones, suggest that the influence of a household’s e/p characteristics on meat purchases was complex, and not simply a reflection of their ability to pay.

Representativeness is as important in archaeological analysis as it is difficult to control. If some of these collections are the products of wildly idiosyncratic behavior, the apparent patterns may not be noteworthy. With that caveat in mind, our data strongly indicate that the working-class people of West Oakland ate far greater quantities of expensive meat than one might expect from the occasional Sunday dinner or holiday celebration.

What could be the explanation?
**Science at the Table**

Prized but not always available, meat was the most sought-after food in the homes of working-class Americans in the middle of the 19th century. Vegetables, on the other hand, were valued only for taste, variety, and for the bulk they provided. Many people were positively mistrustful of green vegetables, blaming them (in some cases with justification) for the spread of cholera and other diseases endemic to the newly industrial cities, whose populations had outgrown their infrastructures (Cummings 1941:43). Well into the 20th century, potatoes and products made of cereal flour filled, with varying adequacy, most peoples’ nutritional needs. The 20th century saw a massive decline in the consumption of carbohydrates in the form of starch from sources such as bread and cereal, while the daily per-capita consumption of beef nearly doubled between 1910 and 1976 (Brewster and Jacobson 1978).

The first scientific study of the American diet was undertaken in 1874. It was not until the late 1880s, however, that the combined resources of businessman Edward Atkinson and nutritionist Wilbur Atwater led to a pivotal series of articles in the reformist *Century* and *Domestic Science* magazines. Atkinson and Atwater were a pair of Victorian rationalists who believed that the country’s social problems could be defined and solved by science. Behavioral change would proceed quite naturally from education, or so they believed. The poor, wrote Atwater, must be “free from ignorance and prejudice, and must understand the principles that underlie the right practice of the arts of life” (1888:444).

Their zeal was driven by anecdotal accounts and, later, by survey data that demonstrated that working-class people sometimes paid more for food than was necessary to get adequate nutrition. This situation was abhorrent to the reformist pair for its inefficient use of resources. Atwater felt that if the poor spent their money wisely on more nutritious food, they would have more for housing and clothes. As a chemist, Atwater did not concern himself with such irrelevancies as palatability and desire; only nutrition was significant in “scientific eating” (Cummings 1941:80).

The social effects of industrialization were clear, and empirical studies of the working-class diet in the United Kingdom and North America were initiated in both regions in the 1880s (Oddy 1976). Men like Atwater and Rowntree (1902)—who brought public attention to the terrible conditions of English industrial workers—were social reformers as well as scientists. One reformer after another complained that working-class households, even the poorest, spent too much of their money on high-quality meat and continued to do so even when told of the error of their ways (Rowntree 1902). Those who did economize on meat cuts made up for the savings by purchasing lavish sauces and

**Expert Opinion?**

The experts get it wrong sometimes.

Writing before an understanding of the crucial role of vitamins and minerals in healthy eating, Wilbur Atwater and the followers of scientific, rational housekeeping suggested that the “cost of a diet may be diminished by consuming less fruit, less expensive cuts of meat, and fewer vegetables” (Atwater and Bryant 1898:72).

One might also muse on the words of nutritionists Brewster and Jacobson, who predicted that “because imitation meat made from soybeans is a low-cost and low-fat alternative to red meat, we may see more and more of it in the future” (1978:65). From the vantage point of nearly 30 years it is clear that, like their 19th-century predecessor, Dr. Atwater, these scientists placed too much confidence in a rational, modern-day form of optimal foraging over cultural decision-making.
relishes to counteract the dull fare (Figure 3.13). The poorest Italian immigrants to Chicago would not dream of buying anything but Italian olive oil, in spite of its high cost relative to similar products (Atwater and Bryant 1898:15). Commodities like wheat flour, rice, potatoes, and beans could provide the same quality of nutrition at a fraction of the cost of beef. But only meat would suffice, and the working class “showed little interest in increasing their intake of vegetation proteins” (Oddy 1976:225).

Anecdotes describing the profligate working class (such as the following story from Wilbur Atwater’s classic tract “The Pecuniary Economy of Food”) appear frequently in the writings of the era’s reform-minded nutritionists: In the 1880s, a Boston butcher asked a poor seamstress why she purchased tenderloin and not the cheaper round or sirloin steak. She replied indignantly, “Do you suppose because I don’t come here in my carriage I don’t want just as good meat as rich folks have?” (Atwater 1888, emphasis added).

Atwater felt that the core of this problem was in “the conceit, let us call it, that there is some kind of mysterious virtue in these kinds of foods that . . . have the highest price” (1888:437). Although the butcher’s tale may be literally true, it has the feel of allegory, a form to which the Victorians were quite partial in their tireless search for moral lessons. To Atwater, the widow’s behavior was an extravagance that represented the irrational, unscientific approach to household economics endemic among the working class.

Writing of 19th-century Germany, Teuteberg summed up both the situation and the frustration of the scientists who encountered it: “Economic necessities certainly did shape nutritional behavior . . . in the direction of greater rationality, but irrational motives continued to play a part . . . expenditures for food were, in many cases uneconomical and conditioned by emotion” (1975:102). Far from purchasing food appropriate to their economic station, the poor industrial workers of 19th-century Massachusetts “want the best food and are the most fastidious” (Massachusetts Labor Bureau, quoted in Atwater 1888:442). Why couldn’t the working class just be sensible?

Republicanism and Meat

In the 1832 account of her visit to America, the imperious Frances Trollope comments on the widespread belief in social equality among white Americans (Trollope 1960). The republican ideology manifested itself in a lack of deference to one’s social betters, a traditional convention in Europe. Although hardly shocking to modern sensibilities, to an English lady of the 1820s

Figure 3.13. Peppersauce bottle. This bottle of peppersauce recovered from the Railroad Exchange Hotel well still contained the seeds of the peppers and raisins that gave it its tangy flavor. Nineteenth-century diners were especially fond of such sauces and condiments for dressing-up dull food, especially low-cost meats (Well 4600).
this was an appalling breach that brought to mind the excesses of the French revolution and the
democratic goals of the Chartists at home.

Mrs. Trollope was not alone in her concern. While Jeffersonian democracy was lauded in
North America, the middle class nevertheless feared the ambitions of the “rabble.” Victorianism
(Howe 1976) and its social restraints were, in part, a reaction to the social turmoil of the era, as the
middle class sought to establish a safe and structured environment. This was particularly notable
in the home, where a raft of etiquette books published from the 1840s onward show the ever-
increasing ritualization of dining (Schlesinger 1946). In the public realm, education based on
the principals of domestic reform would elevate the working class and immigrants, allowing
them to see the error of their old habits.

Paul Shackel (1998) has demonstrated how overtly political republicanism could be
displayed through consumer goods such as tableware. We suggest that the working-class
households of West Oakland expressed, in their selections of food, the values described by Mrs.
Trollope. Atwater sums up the attitude of the 19th-century American: “to economize closely is
beneath us. We do not want to live cheaply, we want to live well,” economizing was incompatible
with “our dignity as free-born Americans” (1888:445). In the same way that displaying the
appropriate parlor paraphernalia showed one’s attachment to certain values, eating meat above
one’s station was also an expression of egalitarian, republican sentiment. Thus, the meaning of
meat (or at least expensive meat) is less clearly not an outcome of pure economics. Its purchase
by working-class Oaklanders was not the economically rational act envisioned by Atwater,
wherein choice should be determined by one’s ability to pay and where meat is conceived of as
little more than nutrient mass in its predigested stage.

In the field of microeconomics it is axiomatic that, all else being equal, resources are allocated
so as to maximize the benefit gained from them. Similarly, modern theories of rational choice
emphasize how people anticipate alternative outcomes and various courses of action and decide
which will be best for them; “rational individuals choose the alternative that is likely to give
them the greatest satisfaction” (Carling 1992:27). Household nutrition studies tend to begin
with an assumption of the primacy of nutrition and economics in the household decision-making
process. On the supply side are variables such as availability and price, while consumer-side
constraints involve the ability of the purchaser to pay and their preferences. Historians and
archaeologists have been studying the role of ethnicity in food choices for years, while social
class has received less attention except as a function of the customer’s ability and willingness to
pay.

Two things we know for sure:

• there was no neat correspondence between a family’s wealth and the purchase of
  high-quality cuts of meat in 19th-century Oakland;

• and, as Dr. Atwater would have agreed, the meaning of meat extended beyond
  nourishment.

What the 19th-century reformers saw as an oddity is suggested by our studies of West
Oakland households to be a distinctive working-class practice. Rather than a behavioral quirk
or statistical outlier, the purchase of commodities above one’s conventionally assigned status
seems to have been a common practice. We continue this topic in Chapter 11. There we use
additional classes of artifacts to suggest that this was not irrational behavior. For in the remains
of their meals and other purchases, we see people seeking to advance goals that had less to do
with nutrition or class emulation than with pride and identity.