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Between Vision and Practice: Archaeological Perspectives on the Llano del Rio Cooperative

ABSTRACT

Ideology is perhaps nowhere more patently visible in the archaeological record than at utopian communities. While ideology informs all human action, the tenets of utopian ventures operate on a more fully conscious level than those underlying mainstream culture. The deliberate use of symbolism is a hallmark of the way utopians sought to define themselves and their visions. By comparing these utopian visions with the actual practices of such groups, archaeologists can deepen understandings of the challenges and lessons evolving from the pursuit of such experiments. Recent archaeological investigations at the Llano del Rio Cooperative are used to explore these issues. Socialists established the Llano cooperative near Los Angeles in 1914 as an act of political and economic resistance to the growth of industrial capitalism. There, the colonists sought to create a self-sufficient, secular, egalitarian community that would demonstrate a viable alternative to capitalistic exploitation.

Introduction

Historical archaeology has for several decades increasingly immersed itself in the dissonance between how people portray themselves in words and writing and what the materials they leave behind reveal about their behavior. This intellectual undertaking is not so much an attempt to expose dishonesty as it is an effort to grasp more deeply the ways—both deliberate and subconscious—people construct meaning and grapple with contradictions. Concepts such as ideology, cognition, meaning, and symbolic content are central to this endeavor and have received much thoughtful attention within the discipline (Hodder 1986; Leone and Potter 1988; De Cunzo and Herman 1996). For several reasons, these concerns are perhaps nowhere more readily amenable to investigation than at sites occupied by utopian visionaries.

Utopian communities, taken here to encompass groups at both the progressive and conservative “fringes” of mainstream culture, are characterized in part by their consciously held ideologies. The deliberation with which the members of such settlements actively and systematically constructed their worldviews stands in contrast to the more subtle logic underlying the behavior of various sectors of the dominant society. This is not to imply that the behavior of people closer to the mainstream lacks ideological content. But mainstream ideology can be seen as operating on what may be considered a more subconscious level. That is to say, many cultural values are simply taken for granted. Clifford Geertz (1983:74) refers to these kinds of buried assumptions as a system of common sense comprised of “received practices, accepted beliefs, habitual judgements, and untaught emotions . . . that are so prominent a feature of our own landscape that we cannot imagine a world in which they, or something resembling them, do not exist.” In contrast, utopian ideologies very consciously diverged from and challenged mainstream assumptions.

The fact that utopian ideology was in the forefront of the consciousness of its adherents has several implications. In the first place, utopian ideology served as a pervasive influence on their behavior. Even the most mundane activities often were subject to deliberation and therefore imbued with meaning and symbolism. One consequence of this enhanced symbolic content is that the ideology of such groups is in many ways more visible in both the historical and archaeological record. Another implication is that utopians viewed themselves as separate from and embodying a counterpoint to the dominant society. Utopian communities actively resisted specific dominant culture forms and moral imperatives and developed worldviews that reacted to what they considered undesirable aspects of the outside world. As such, they constitute a valuable commentary on the dominant culture. They are also potentially instructive places to explore how social boundaries and identities are negotiated and what worked or failed in such experimental social visions. Archaeology may be particularly valuable as an independent line of evidence helpful in sorting out the often highly...
polarized views arising from within and outside of such communities.

The active creation of alternative lifestyles also necessarily involved an experimental component that commonly laid bare the dynamics of power and the degree to which social precepts were in fact shared. How was the overarching philosophy of a utopian group translated into specific daily practices, and who made those decisions? How were shared visions constructed? In what ways did groups respond to contradictions, failures, and struggles to control the trajectory of such communities? Having broken out of the mold of mainstream tradition, the members of utopian communities often confronted (and transformed) their vision on a daily basis. Studying those processes may yield important lessons about how social change is most effectively fomented, contributing to the growing social relevance of historical archaeology in the modern world.

These issues are explored here using information derived from recent archaeological and historical investigations of the Llano del Rio Cooperative (CA-LAN-2677H), a socialist community established near Los Angeles in the mid-1910s. Like many other utopian communities of its time, Llano was created as an alternative to the dehumanizing forces of industrial capitalism. Job Harriman (1917:8), Llano’s key founder and a leading figure in American Socialist Party activities, characterized those forces as “take all you can and keep all you take, that is the creed of capitalism that is poisoning the soul of humanity.” The vision espoused by Harriman and his followers is first characterized before turning to the history of the colony and some of the initial findings evolving from recent work there.

**Job Harriman and the Llano Vision**

The Llano del Rio Cooperative was an outgrowth of the evolving Socialist movement and other affiliated progressive agendas. Springing from reformist Marxist roots, socialism did not assume a powerful role in American politics until working-class republicanism, “with its emphasis on people working for themselves” (Gutman 1987:335), collapsed in the wake of increasing government intercession in trade union disputes in the early 1890s—most notoriously the Pullman Strike of 1892. Responses to this government intervention varied widely. Whereas “the Industrial Workers of the World flamboyantly occupied the labor movement’s revolutionary wing” (Kazin 1995:316), and Samuel Gompers of the American Federation of Labor counseled “moderation and acceptance of the powers that be” following a Spencerian view that the conditions of workers would naturally improve (Licht 1995:181), leaders of the Socialist Party “believed in a gradual transformation of capitalism through the ballot box and the universal organization of wage-earners” (Kazin 1995:315).

Harriman was a prominent socialist lawyer, labor activist, and politician. He arrived in California in 1886 and was soon a well-known figure in radical circles (Greenstein et al. 1992). A charismatic public speaker, Harriman made an unsuccessful bid for governor on the Socialist Labor ticket in 1898 and ran for vice president with Eugene Debs in the presidential campaign of 1900. Twice (in 1911 and again in 1913) he came close to being elected mayor of Los Angeles. His narrow defeat in the 1911 mayoral election may be attributed in part to his defense of the McNamara brothers who eventually confessed to bombing the vehemently antilabor Los Angeles Times after drawing considerable sympathy nationwide as an ostensibly innocent cause celebre of the national labor movement.

Harriman’s defeats in the political arena ultimately convinced him of the need for “an economic, rather than a political base for spreading the socialist word” (Hine 1966:117). This view conflicted with the widely held belief among socialists of the period that “the powers of government must be captured before any far-reaching, practical steps could be taken in the economic field” (Shor 1997:163). Harriman envisioned a utopian colony in which the fruits of labor would benefit the members. He believed that socialism “needed a concrete example of successful cooperative life” because “people would never abandon their means of livelihood, good or bad, capitalistic or otherwise, until other methods were developed which would promise advantages at least as good as those by which they were living” (Hine 1966:117).

Like many Americans in the late-19th and early-20th centuries, Harriman and his followers came to view utopianism as a stepping-stone to
achieving social, political, and economic change. “Bathed in the essential optimism of the era and confident of social progress,” progressives were taken with the idea of creating utopian colonies as models of “an ideal society whose principles other colonies and eventually mankind in general would follow” (Hine 1966:4–5). This thinking was encouraged by influential authors such as Edward Bellamy (1909) and William Dean Howells (1962), whose novels Looking Backward: 2000–1887 and A Traveler from Altruria, respectively, “portrayed the evolution of socialist society as a rational, nonviolent process which involved few or no changes in the nuclear family and the private home” (Hayden 1976:289).

In the absence of a working model for this egalitarian community, Howells’s fantasy was perhaps the one that most directly influenced Harriman’s vision for the Llano cooperative. That socialist vision derived in part from Karl Marx’s influential view that society would be best served if workers owned the means of production, thus thwarting exploitation of their labor by capitalists. Joint ownership and political parity were thus cornerstones of Harriman’s proposal for the cooperative. Perhaps even more revolutionary was the proposal, espoused by Marx in 1875, that a communistic society would operate “from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs” (Marx 1973). This implied human needs should be met, regardless of how much or little a given member was able to contribute.

Plans for the socialist community were also influenced by other progressive agendas, notably those influenced by women. The Women’s Socialist League of Los Angeles became the leading voice for a national agenda promoting women’s issues both within the Socialist Party and in women’s clubs in the early 1900s (Buhle 1981:119–120). Veterans of abolitionism, women’s suffrage, and Christian Socialist endeavors, these feminists sought to extend the socialist vision to women in both the workplace and domestic spheres, using principles associated with the broad movement toward domestic reform. Suzanne Spencer-Wood (1994:178) has defined that movement as “a variety of activities by a large number of interrelated but diverse 19th-century social movements that shared the goals of improving the status and conditions of women’s lives by expanding women’s roles, economic independence, and power in both the public and private spheres.” Use of the term feminist in this article refers to this broad agenda, not just the women’s suffrage movement.

At Llano, feminist influences were most evident in community and household planning, child rearing and education, and the pursuit of some kinds of work traditionally dominated by men. The Montessori kindergarten at Llano, taught by Dr. Maria Montessori’s student Prudence Stokes Brown, is one example of this influence. The kindergarten was emblematic of efforts to move housekeeping and child-rearing tasks, considered female spheres of work, into the public domain and to recognize them as professions (Spencer-Wood 1991:265–269, 1994:179,190). The kindergarten also effectively freed some women with young children to do other types of work in the community. Women’s roles in the cooperative also developed along more radical lines. Some women performed nontraditional tasks such as carpentry (Figure 1), and women were also full voting members of the cooperative. In this latter capacity, they were instrumental in passing ordinances involving issues central to the domestic reform agenda. For example, alcohol use was strictly prohibited unless it was prescribed by a doctor and could result in “the cancellation of the work contract and expulsion from the colony” (Shor 1997:170).

Another recognizable feminist thread at Llano consisted of plans created for the cooperative by self-trained architect Alice C. Austin. Influenced by the “arts and crafts” movement, domestic reform concepts, and progressive works such as Ebenezer Howard’s (1902) Garden Cities of To-Morrow, Austin (1935) proposed a model city built around a radial street system with inset parkways. Her plans stressed beauty, illustration of the solidarity of the community, equal opportunities, and laborsaving devices. In this latter category, she designed communal kitchens and underground conveyor systems for both food and laundry “so that female colonists would not have to devote so much time to domestic drudgery” (Hayden 1976:301). Austin’s proposed conveyor systems were no doubt influenced by similar proposals made by Mary C. Stuckert for Denver row houses and by John Ablett, Charles Lamb, and Edgar Chambless for food-delivery systems in Chicago, New York City, and Los Angeles respectively (Hayden 1981:187,243).
Also concerned with the organization of domestic work, Austin’s plans for Llano residences incorporated features to limit housekeeping chores and ensure children could be easily monitored throughout the dwellings (Austin 1935). She even built scale models of some of the buildings she designed for Llano. While period photographs suggest few of these ideas were apparently implemented, surprisingly little is actually known about the use of space within the community and the internal organization of dwellings and other buildings. Archaeology clearly has the potential to shed light on such issues as well as on broader concerns for how the social and economic goals of the cooperative worked out in actual practice. Before considering recent archaeological contributions, some historical details are first offered to introduce the Llano cooperative.

**Historical Sketch of the Llano del Río Cooperative**

In late 1913, Harriman and some of his sympathizers purchased the defunct Mescal Water and Land Company for $80,000, perhaps oblivious to or simply ignoring the failure of an earlier quasi-utopian agricultural colony named Almondale (Hayden 1976). Soon renamed the Llano del Río Company, the nascent socialist cooperative was ironically set up as a stock-issuing corporation controlled by its owner-members (California Secretary of State 1914) (Figure 2). The company’s stock certificates offer a vision resplendent with orchards, flowing water, and agricultural fecundity, typical of the idealistic vision used to attract new members. In reality, the colony was situated at the western edge of the arid Mojave Desert near Los Angeles.
Angeles, California (Figure 3). Nestled against the east side of the San Gabriel Mountains, the colony lay south of Big Rock Creek—formerly known as Llano del Rio (Spanish for “plain of the river”).

The first colonists arrived in March 1914. Prospective colonists were required to fill out a membership application that posed such questions as “Do you believe in the profit system?” and “Will solving economic problems ultimately lead to solving the social problem?” indicating that “there may have been an attempt to elicit a level of ideological commitment before admission to the colony” (Shor 1997:166). The colony sought “only men and women whose high ideals, industrious inclinations and record of sobriety are such as to qualify them” (Clifton 1918b). This application process was eventually abandoned.

Each colonist was initially required to purchase $2,000 in shares, theoretically making all members equal partners in the corporation. Half of those shares had to be purchased with cash or contributed property, while the remainder was credited as labor in monthly statements. All members were promised a daily wage of $4.00 (an average day’s wage at the time was $2.00), a quarter of which could be applied toward their unpaid balance. The remaining earnings were accumulated as credit, against which food, clothing, and shelter were charged. Robert Hine (1966:120) claims this arrangement was later “superseded by an agreement . . . in which the community came to guarantee each member the necessities of life regardless of his credit;” however, monthly statements were still being prepared even in the final months of the colony (Figure 4).
The cooperative’s government comprised a board of directors that, in turn, appointed a superintendent and through him managed the economic and political affairs of the colony. Actual political control belonged to the stockholder-members who elected officers and the board of directors, formulated policies, and gave direction to the superintendent. The “General Assembly,” as the membership body was known, “assumed its powers with a vengeance, never hesitating to dispute decisions of the board,” but its power was weakened due to internal squabbling (Hine 1966:122). For example, a group of colonists who called themselves the “Welfare League” attempted to implement a new political system in 1915, but they were rebuffed. They subsequently petitioned State Commissioner of Corporations H. L. Carnahan for an investigation. The resulting report, while derisive of the colony, found no fault with its political structure (McKean 1916). The corporation was nevertheless reorganized, 32 disgruntled members were ousted, and the directors assumed greater control thereafter.

Llanoites were exclusively white and for the most part also presumably middle class, given the costs associated with membership. Although not openly discriminatory, the colony’s promotional brochure “Gateway to Freedom” states that, while the colony had received inquiries from “Negroes, Hindus, Mongolians, and Malays,” these applications were turned down “not due to race prejudice but because it is not deemed expedient to mix the races in these communities” (Harriman 1917). Francis Shor (1997:166) observes, “while the Socialist Party of Southern California made overtures to African Americans and other minorities, the general policy of most white Socialists, including those at Llano, manifested deep-rooted racist biases.” The exclusivity of the membership in fact reflected a widespread trend toward what Walter Licht (1995:65) has referred to as the “districting of difference,” wherein the white middle classes moved out of ethnically mixed city neighborhoods and into more homogenous suburban settings.

Although the population of the community has often been estimated at nearly 1,000 members, recent investigation suggests it probably never exceeded half that number (Van Bueren and Hupp 2000). The population as indicated in
voter records, period photographs of community events and school classes, correspondence, and other records suggest at least 254 male and 123 female members, including at least 80 married couples and 29 children. Not all of those known members resided at the colony concurrently. Some members like Harriman merely visited the colony and lived elsewhere. A variety of professions are listed for the colonists in the Los Angeles County (1916b) Great Register of Voters and other sources, with a strong representation of farmers and craftsmen but also including some professionals such as doctors, engineers, and a land surveyor. Of 88 women with a listed occupation, 72 were identified as housewives, and 16 others were listed with specific professions. Those professional women consisted of six teachers, three stenographers, two artists, the Llano hotel manager, a bookkeeper, the assistant postmaster, and a seamstress.

The Llano colony also grew in physical size, eventually encompassing more than 2,000 acres with an assessed value for improvements on that land rising from a mere $320 in 1915 to $12,750 by 1918 (Van Bueren and Hupp 2000:16). The core area of the settlement included a dense group of communal and industrial buildings surrounded by a sea of residential structures—many of them consisting of wood-frame tents (Figure 5). The colony also leased or had other agreements to use an undetermined amount of additional acreage, including a cattle camp north of the main colony, a lumber camp in the San Gabriel Timberland Reserve, and two limestone quarries with kilns located roughly three miles south of the main corporate landholdings.

Various plans were developed for the Llano colony, with the most detailed ones developed by Leonard Cooke in 1915 (see volume cover) and by architect Austin in 1916. Such visionary plans were not unanimously supported by the colonists, and the immediate and pressing needs of the collective had to be addressed. With colonists arriving daily, wood-framed tents were assembled, and promises were repeatedly made that more substantial housing would soon be built. Many colonists remained in tents until the end, despite ongoing ads in the colony’s publication The Western Comrade boasting

FIGURE 5. A view from the urban core of the Llano Cooperative ca. 1916, facing southwest, with the blacksmith and machine shop in the left foreground and the main residential neighborhood extending into the distance. (Courtesy of the West Antelope Valley Historical Society, Palmdale, CA.).
the imminent completion of houses, barns, workshops, and dwellings.

Several transfers of the cooperative’s estate offer snapshots of the improvements, industries, and equipment owned by the cooperative at various points in time. Those transfers took place to protect the assets of the cooperative from seizure during bankruptcy and foreclosure proceedings. The most detailed inventory of non-real property is found in a grant deed dated 15 March 1916 that specifies

529 stand of bees; 185 tons of ensilage and vegetables; 1839 gallons of vinegar and preserves of every nature; 25 tons of bulk vegetables; 91 cows; 50 head of young stock; 10 milk goats; 1 Sudan buck; 150 hogs; 33 geldings; 29 mares; 1 stallion; 2 mare colts; 2 gelding colts; 11 mules; 6 mule colts; 1400 rabbits; 977 chickens; 3 turkeys; stock of paints and oils; 172 tents of various sizes; carpenter’s tools and hardware; a complete planing mill; stock of lumber; one lime kiln including a forge and tools; stock merchandise, groceries, dry goods, and boots and shoes; one cement plant with mixers and fixtures; one tin shop complete with tools and stock; one steam laundry; one shoe repair outfit and materials; farmer’s machinery including plows, wagons, cultivators, mowers, rakes, scraper, and drills; one Best caterpillar tractor; one Hart Parr tractor; one bakeoven outfit; pharmacy stock; one Montessori school outfit; one sawmill; one light mountain transit; furniture; office fixtures; and all manner of farm tools and house implements” (Los Angeles County 1916b).

A wide range of industries, construction projects, and agricultural ventures were initiated at the Llano colony, with most decisions handled by a small group of managers organized into five basic divisions. Those divisions consisted of farming, livestock, construction, industrial, and administrative functions. Agriculture was the colony’s chief industry. During the 1917 season, the Llano cooperative cultivated 400 acres of alfalfa, 200 acres of corn, 120 acres of orchards, a 100-acre nursery, a 120-acre garden, and nearly 1,000 acres in grain and general farm crops (Clifton 1918a:81). Small vegetables were difficult to grow because of strong winds, and often “weeks went by with no other vegetable than carrots” (Hine 1966:122). Although the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (1916) indicates the colony produced 75% of its own food supply in 1915 and 90% in 1916, periodic food shortages were apparently common.

By the end of 1916, serious doubts arose about whether the utopian experiment could sustain itself in a desert environment. A variety of problems were manifest, most stemming from the settlement’s exponential growth and limitations associated with its desert setting. There were not enough houses, crops, or infrastructure to keep pace with the new members. Economic hardship also eroded the egalitarian principles upon which the colony was founded. Recurrent food shortages reportedly led to widespread individual hoarding. Moreover, constant bickering over even the most trivial matters seriously undermined Harriman’s theory that “the hearts and minds of men would be as sweet and gentle and loving as in babyhood, if the stream of life were not polluted by the vicious methods of the universal conflict of interests” associated with capitalism (Kagan 1975:123).

The colony also began to experience severe labor shortages and suffered serious setbacks in its attempts to gain a better water supply. Both had devastating impacts. With the United States’ entry into World War I, many younger Llanoites were either drafted into military service or drawn back to the city by the promise of high-paying jobs in factories and the defense industry (Millsap 1969). For example, Llano reportedly lost nearly 200 colonists between May and June 1917 during the first month after the United States declared war on Germany (Greenstein et al. 1992:118). Meanwhile, permission to construct a dam that would remedy the inadequate water supply was blocked when the cooperative lost a lawsuit brought by neighboring ranchers (Greenstein et al. 1992:117–119).

The colony’s degeneration coincides with a general loss of optimism and disillusionment with the social-reform ideology that marked the Progressive Era. The term socialist also took on a negative connotation after the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, and, as a result, the national labor movement lost momentum. With the surge of patriotism following the United States’ entry into World War I in April 1917, trade unions such as the Industrial Workers of the World were increasingly decried as anti-American. Within this context, about 200 remaining members of the Llano colony moved to a new location in Louisiana in late 1917. The New Llano colony eventually prospered and gained self-sufficiency for a number of years before eventually disbanding in 1937 under the pressures induced by the Great Depression.
Some Preliminary Archaeological Insights

Archaeological investigation of the Llano cooperative (CA-LAN-2677H) was prompted by plans to expand State Route 138 through the center of the former community. Already listed as California Historical Landmark 933, the colony was considered “the most important non-religious utopian experiment in western American history” by the California Office of Historic Preservation (1990:100). Little was actually known about the extent, layout, and survival of the physical remains of the colony, despite an abundant documentary record and numerous in-depth historical analyses (Clifton 1918a, 1918b; Hine 1966; Hayden 1976; Greenstein et al. 1992). Gaining a broad perspective on the colony as a surviving cultural landscape was thus an important initial focus of investigation, carried out in order to understand the colony’s significance relative to National Register of Historic Places criteria (Van Bueren 2000; Van Bueren and Hupp 2000).

Title research was first conducted to identify all lands formerly owned by the colony. Aerial photos were then used to distinguish major clusters of features, water distribution systems, and agricultural fields on more than 2,000 acres of discontiguous land once owned by the cooperative. Because little development has occurred in the vicinity since the colony was abandoned, abundant evidence survives, and the sparse desert vegetation made it possible to discern ruins, canals, building pads, and even tillage marks. Historic photographs like Figure 5 also helped confirm ideas about the extent of development in the colony’s urban core. Given the limited scope of the highway project relative to the colony acreage, areas of concentrated development were given higher priority for the survey effort than the rest of the colony lands. The need to obtain entry rights from literally hundreds of private landholders also placed some constraints on where it was possible to survey.

Systematic inspection focused on the urban core of the settlement and several outlying industrial and cultural activity areas identified in the preliminary research. The outliers consisted of two limestone quarries with limekilns and a cemetery (Figure 6). More cursory attention was devoted to areas apparently used for agriculture. Roughly 15% of the colony’s lands were examined intensively, with all structural features photographed, planned, and recorded with global positioning system (GPS) equipment accurate to less than a meter. Cursory survey was also performed in agricultural tracts to identify water-distribution systems. Surface artifacts associated with each identified feature were described by functional type and temporal attributes. Following the field effort, GPS data were imported into ArcView®, and other data layers such as topography were added to the site mapping. The urban core of the colony is shown in Figure 7.

Nearly 400 surface features were recorded during the initial survey. That total is not likely to rise appreciably because virtually all of the developed portions of the colony have been

<table>
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FIGURE 6. Survey coverage and key activity areas shown in relation to Llano landholdings. (Drawing by author.)
FIGURE 7. Archaeological map of Llano's urban core with one row of dwellings reflecting a radial layout, indicated by bold vector extending south-southeast from center point. (Drawing by author.)
inspected (Table 1). Building ruins such as
the Llano Hotel (the colony’s main meeting hall,
dining area, and facility for visiting guests and
prospective members), barns and silo (Figure 8),
a creamery, and men’s dormitory comprise 19
of the recorded features, while structure pads
collectively account for nearly half of the total
(Figure 9), and various pit features comprise
another quarter of the sample. The recorded
features also included industrial areas such as
limekilns (Figure 10), blacksmith and automo-
tive shop, and community laundry. Mortared
cobble structures clearly had greater longevity
than adobe houses even in this arid environ-
ment, and mortared cobble construction was
also used for the extensive canal system. Col-
lectively, these vestiges afford a clear sense of
the scope of the colony and the ways spaces
within it were used.

At the largest scale, it was of interest to
determine how the actual configuration of the
colony compared with the visionary radial
plans developed by Cooke, Austin, and others.
Although research confirmed that the urban core
was largely set up on a simple grid aligned on
north-south and east-west axes, one row of
dwellings does appear to have a radial align-
ment centered on the middle of Section 21 at
the actual heart of the former colony. Absent
subsurface samples from this radial row of
dwelling pads and the nonaligned pads around
them, it remains for future research to determine
precisely where they fit into the developmental
sequence of the colony. The alignment is most
consistent with Austin’s radial plan drawn ca.
1916, rather than Cooke’s earlier hexagonal ver-
sion prepared in early 1915.

FIGURE 8. Surviving ruins of one of Llano’s dairy barns
(Feature 102) and a silo (Feature 103) at the far south end
of core area. (Photo by author.)

FIGURE 9. This typical raised earth pad (Feature 220) once
supported a dwelling and facilitated runoff. In this view,
GPS mapping is in progress. (Photo by author.)

FIGURE 10. The Bob’s Gap limekiln, one of three such
facilities located in the foothills of the San Gabriel Moun-
tains, a few miles south of the colony commons. (Photo
by author.)
This finding is of some interest partly because historical research determined that the northeastern quadrant of Cooke’s (1915; see volume cover) hexagonal plan was formally surveyed and mapped in the northeast quarter of Section 21 in April 1915. The cooperative subsequently recorded that map as Subdivision Tract 2759 with the County of Los Angeles the next year. Survey along the margins of that hexagonal subdivision resulted in the discovery of some of the original wood survey stakes, confirming that it was actually laid out on the ground. Although that part of the colony has not yet been systematically surveyed, cursory inspection suggests the Tract 2759 subdivision was probably never occupied.

It is clear that some limited effort went into realizing at least two different visionary designs, although most construction followed a very traditional grid system. The traditional grid was perhaps a temporary measure, explained in part by the pressing demands of a rapidly growing population and the need to accommodate it. This evidence of three distinctly different community plans illustrates the internal tensions at work in the cooperative. Historical sources reveal that rivalries existed and that the ouster of members of the reformist Welfare League is one example. Hine (1966) and others have also noted a gradual shift from a community founded by what Paul Greenstein and colleagues (1992: 88) have called “starry-eyed Socialists” to one increasingly dominated by more pragmatic working-class trade unionists.

Understanding the developmental sequence of the colony will help unravel and add depth to existing interpretations of these vying ideologies and their evolution. For example, it may be possible to test the idea that the radial alignment of dwellings shown in Figure 7 postdates Austin’s ca. 1916 community design. Despite the short period of occupation at Llano, at least two lines of evidence may help define when particular structures were built and modified. Period photographs, some with precise dates and others less accurately dated, offer direct evidence of what buildings were present at particular points in time near the urban core. One pattern evident in such photographs is the progressive expansion of the colony outward from its central commons.

Archaeological evidence may also provide clues that can establish building construction sequences within the 1914–1917 period of colony occupation. Because buildings were closely spaced on elevated pads, stratigraphic layers may sometimes overlap and be used to establish sequencing. Excavation will be required to analyze such relationships, and, regretfully, very little has occurred to date. So far excavations have taken place at only five buildings, comprising two communal and three widely spaced residential structures where no stratigraphic overlap was present. That initial subsurface sampling did reveal the use of buried tent hold-downs, a finding that may have temporal implications (Figure 11). Violent storms in December 1915 reportedly tore the roof from the Llano Hotel and leveled 21 tents, while another storm in February 1916 virtually flattened the colony. The heavily reinforced hold-downs appear to reflect a strategy adopted after those storm events.

Occupation of the colony also took place during a period of rapid technological change, with the result that very closely dated artifacts may help date some individual features. Only
one closely dated artifact was observed on the surface of the one observed radial alignment of house pads—a single ferrous canning jar lid liner that postdates 1915. Surface inspection of the colony’s urban core revealed 12 surface artifacts with beginning production dates within the known period of colony occupation (1914–1917) and 15 with production ending dates during that same period. Excavations are likely to substantially enlarge these assemblages and provide better temporal resolution. Work completed at just five structures has even produced two artifacts—canvas tent fasteners—made at the colony and bearing its name.

Investigation of the radial subdivision of a quarter section of land (Tract 2759) in the northeast quarter of the colony’s urban core may contribute significantly to understandings of how community planning and social organization evolved at Llano. While that portion of the colony has not yet been investigated, it poses some fundamental questions about how private and cooperative agendas were balanced. The act of subdividing Tract 2759 into lots implies there may have been plans afoot to privatize the collective. This finding is not wholly out of step with the tenor of the cooperative, which was a corporation made up of individual owner-members. It is also consistent with Howells’s (1962) fictional utopia Altruria, envisioned as a socialist society that preserved the nuclear family and private home. However, privatization would probably have reduced rather than inspired cooperation, thus potentially undermining group cohesion. Future work may productively examine if titles to the lots in Tract 2759 were ever transferred to members and whether any of them were in fact occupied.

The size of residential buildings and their construction methods also are likely to yield insights into the differential treatment of the colonists. Estimates of the numbers of tents versus more permanent dwellings are available, although some of those inventories may have been inflated to impress prospective members. Greenstein and colleagues (1992:103) state that there were 26 adobe houses, 14 wood-frame houses, and 90 tent houses in October 1915, but they offer no source for that assertion. A March 1916 grant deed (no. 6274:141) lists 172 tents and no adobe or wood houses at all, while a period photograph confirms that at least three adobe houses were eventually built (Los Angeles County 1916b). While subsurface investigations will offer more definitive evidence of the types of dwellings present, surface observations at 161 probable single-family residential structures provide some provisional insights regarding construction methods (Table 2). Only two adobe buildings are indicated for certain, although it appears likely that the presence of concrete, mortared cobbles, and mortared brick perimeter foundations at 23 other structure pads are indicative of structures more substantial than tents.

With only two exceptions, these relatively substantial dwellings are concentrated in the eastern half of the residential neighborhood, whereas tents were aggregated in the tightly gridded western portion. Four of the probable permanent dwellings are located on a radial alignment, while the remaining dwellings are oriented in a standard grid. If those two orientations date to different periods, this finding supports the idea that there was a continuous, if modest, ongoing effort to build permanent housing. It is significant that the more substantial housing was not clustered. The haphazard distribution of the permanent houses nominally implies they were not built systematically. If the progressive expansion of the colony out from the central commons is verified through further study, this appears to suggest that duration of residency was not the prime factor used to determine who was next in line for the colony’s scarce permanent housing.

### TABLE 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foundation</th>
<th>Type of Pad</th>
<th>Concrete</th>
<th>Earth</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dry-laid cobble</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortared cobbles</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concrete</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adobe</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>161</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The diversity of building methods also belies a lack of standardization that may have several interesting implications. We know from historical sources that building practices evolved to some extent in response to problems such as adobe-wall meltdown. Such changing construction methods are reflected in the introduction of the substantial tent tie-downs mentioned above. It may also be true that differences in building construction methods and quality may to some extent express the internal tensions produced by the scarcity of permanent housing and how decisions were made to allocate those resources. Significant variation in dwelling sizes also may have a bearing on the question of unequal treatment, although household size is more likely to have been the prime determinant. The average dwelling measured roughly 16 x 26 ft. and contained roughly 450 ft.² of living space (Table 3). The presence of children’s artifacts function as a public profession. A communal steam laundry and a bake oven are indicated in a March 1916 deed (no. 6274:141) (Los Angeles County 1916a). These facilities support the notion that some tasks were collectivized, although it remains less certain how widely individual households relied on such group services. While communal dining was offered and meal tickets were deducted from colonists’ accounts, initial work shows that food preparation was also taking place within dwellings. Excavations in Llano’s residential neighborhoods will undoubtedly yield significant insights on this topic and shed more light on how private and communal spheres were balanced.

The influence of domestic reform on architecture and the use of space within dwellings remains too poorly known to provide any meaningful interpretations as yet. Excavations have produced information on just three small tent dwellings, all of which were apparently one-room structures. One dwelling (Feature 4) did have a floor surfaced in plaster—a fact implying some emphasis on maintaining cleanliness within this household. However, only that structure (8-1/2 x 12 ft.) was entirely excavated, and it failed to contain any evidence of the differentiation of activity areas within it. Future work may explore whether any of architect Austin’s design concepts for residences were in fact tried in Llano dwellings and how the space within and around houses were used. Some landscaping was observed in the form of exotic trees and arranged rocks, and it appears that communal, rather than individual, privies were employed to address sanitation needs.

So far, no archaeological evidence has been found to support documentation that women worked in male-dominated jobs. It is known from photographs and listings of occupations that men and women did work together in a wide range of tasks and that progressive feminists found opportunities to assume new roles in the colony. Despite the clear inroads women made in the colony workforce, much remains to be learned about how far women were able to stretch the envelope. Industrial areas such as the colony’s blacksmith/machine shop and lime-processing facilities may be some of the best places to look for such insights because female workers would be perhaps least likely in such traditionally male-oriented work. It might be

### TABLE 3
SIZE VARIATION IN 168 RESIDENTIAL DWELLINGS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistics</th>
<th>Length (ft.)</th>
<th>Width (ft.)</th>
<th>Area (ft.²)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>26.18</td>
<td>16.20</td>
<td>454.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>24.60</td>
<td>16.00</td>
<td>402.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>28.00</td>
<td>16.00</td>
<td>224.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>54.00</td>
<td>34.50</td>
<td>1,725.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard error</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>21.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
<td>10.28</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>281.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
very difficult to discern relevant archaeological evidence for several reasons. The first problem is that it may be impossible to distinguish between women workers and female visitors at such facilities. Perhaps the segregation of work and visiting areas may ultimately help resolve this issue. Second, it seems unlikely that women working in such work places would have worn any “feminine” articles that might be taken as evidence of their presence. It is far more likely that they dressed practically in unisex clothing like that shown in Figure 1 and minimized any jewelry. Third, many would question that any particular artifacts can be consigned as the signature of a particular gender. Nevertheless, it will be interesting to see if artifacts most commonly associated with women show up in industrial settings typically considered male venues.

While temperance was not exclusively a women’s issue, the women at Llano were influential in voting to prohibit the consumption of alcoholic beverages except where prescribed by a doctor. Some initial archaeological data do bear evidence on this topic. A total of 60 alcoholic beverage containers was observed in surface contexts at 42 features, and 101 features also contained smoking paraphernalia. The low number of alcohol containers implies that the cooperative’s temperance policy was generally heeded, although further research may change this interpretation because colonists may have taken steps to hide such behavior. The broad dispersion of alcohol bottles across the site implies that abstinence was not practiced on a wholesale basis. Approximately one-quarter of the adult population may have indulged to a limited extent, based on the proportion of dwellings and associated refuse features that contained such evidence.

Another facet of life in the Llano community loaded with ideological significance is the way class values and principles of equality intersected with the use of material goods. While socialist rhetoric and the Llano colony’s propaganda clearly conveyed an egalitarian doctrine, the colony population was far from homogenous with respect to class orientation and identification. Its population embraced people in manual trades as well as professionals and other so-called white-collar workers. How did such differences play out in the context of the collective experience?

Were differences in wealth, occupation, and class de-emphasized to place everyone on the same playing field or were class values expressed in a way that might have contributed to factional behavior and internal friction? What kinds of material trappings are present in private spaces? Many colonists brought with them personal belongings, which were likely arranged in their only personal spaces—the dwellings they occupied. How did colonists negotiate the interface between the private and communal aspects of life at Llano?

Postcards distributed by the colony to attract new members included one view of a tent interior that offers some idea of how the colony sought to portray itself and the class affiliation of its members (Figure 12). Included in that view is a figural art-deco ceramic bust used as a centerpiece on a dining table. Imported Chinese and Japanese ceramics also have been observed throughout the residential areas of the colony, where they speak to the middle-class interest in the exotic—a trend that continues to this day. Excavations are likely to yield important insights regarding how class values may have been portrayed, modified, or downplayed in response to the shared ownership of the cooperative.

Conclusion

Comparing the ideological visions and actual practices of utopian communities offers a rich setting in which to explore how experimental new social behaviors were tried and revised in an effort to break away from unsatisfactory aspects of the dominant society. By creating their own rules, such communities had to struggle to define a shared vision and find suitable symbols to reinforce and convey it to outsiders. Contradictions and power struggles were seemingly inherent in such undertakings. This is not to suggest social change is impossible or that utopian ventures like Llano can be written off as novel failures. Rather, the contradictions and power struggles force researchers to confront the enormous challenges the communities faced and the spin now being placed on their lives. As their radical legacy is examined, the objective should not be just to understand what did not work but also come to grips with what did work and why. This is the radical legacy remaining at places like Llano.
Work at the Llano del Rio Cooperative has only begun to explore the vital dissonance between socialist and feminist visions and practice. Some connections may be made between the pervasive ideologies underlying life in this early-20th-century community and the material record the colonists left behind. The intent of the research has never been to discredit the courageous experiment represented at this short-lived utopian community. Instead, it is apparent that archaeology is uniquely situated to add greater dimension to its story and to draw lessons from it. While Llano may be considered a failure in some absolute sense, it is only through such “mistakes” that any real learning ever occurs. All utopian ventures exist as a commentary upon and lesson for the larger societies from which they diverged. Using archaeological and historical data in tandem, researchers can seek deeper insights into how such endeavors evolved, what their strengths and weaknesses were, and what lessons they may offer for the future.

**Acknowledgments**

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