

Excavation of the Franklin House Foundation  
Along San Diego Avenue  
Old Town San Diego State Historic Park

by

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## Introduction

During the spring of 1981 the streets and sidewalks of Old Town San Diego were modified in order to recreate the street scene as it appeared prior to 1874. Asphalt and cement were removed. The road fill on San Diego Street, brought in for a 1920s trolley car line, was cut back to approximate the original contour. Finally, a mixture of soil and concrete was set down to provide a durable surface that will resemble the original dirt streets of Old Town.

Construction activities were monitored by Frontera Area Historian Alexandra Luberski in an effort to protect or discover buried building foundations and archeological deposits. Her research indicated that the site of the Franklin House was a likely place to find an intact foundation just beneath the surface of the old street. Arrangements were made to test this hypothesis by scheduling a small excavation while road work was going on. A backhoe was used to remove asphalt and a cement curb in this area.

Foundations to the Franklin House were found pretty much where Ms. Luberski had predicted them. Their existence, exact location, and material (whether adobe, cobblestone, wood, or brick) was not previously known. The archeologists arrived on March 16, 1981 to find three bricks together covered only by dust near the corner of the Casa de Juan Rodriguez. In the next two days a line of locally made bricks was uncovered, four bricks wide and four deep, and 31 feet long, a few inches below the former grade of San Diego Avenue across from the plaza.

The following report documents this feature and a small collection of associated artifactual debris. The feature was left in place, covered with sand, and protected by a covering of new pavement. Suggestions are offered for future research at the Franklin House along with a strong recommendation for additional archeological work prior to building reconstruction.

## Research Design:

Archeological testing was intended to answer three questions related to the management and interpretation of this site:

1. Do foundations exist that correlate with superstructure photographs and sketches of the Franklin House?
2. Was the first floor built of wood, adobe, or brick?
3. Were any caches of artifacts buried under the debris of the devastating April 20, 1872 fire?

## Feature Descriptions

Three separate identifiable features were discovered during the course of the excavations. These include a mortared brick foundation wall and two cobblestone and clay features. The descriptions below are brief, due largely to the fact that only three days were available for field work and most of this time was spent exposing the top of the brick foundation wall. It is hoped that future excavations in this area will provide data on construction details of the Franklin House and Colorado House, especially the nature of the cobblestone - clay features and how they relate to the brick wall.

The first and most obvious feature encountered is a mortared brick foundation wall. This wall is 30' 9" long, 16" wide, and 16" - 20" thick. It is made of locally manufactured bricks, 4 courses wide and 4 to 5 courses high. The wall is nearly continuous. Only the western end and a portion near the eastern end is disturbed. The bricks vary in size and color and lack any makers mark. Some bricks show evidence of having been burned as they exhibit a bluish tint and fractured edges. Some may have been re-used from an earlier structure. Fire scars were observed on the surfaces of bricks which were subsequently mortared together. The bricks are mortared end to end except in two places where a single course is mortared end to side (see Fig. 1). These vertically aligned bricks probably mark the placement of internal walls, and are apparently aligned with the position of the veranda support posts farther out in the street. (See the Henfield photo of 1867 in Engstrand and Brandes 1976:4.) Beneath the brick wall was found a thin layer of mortar or lime.

The types of nails, ceramic fragments, melted glass, and fragments of commercial grade glassware all corroborate the conclusion that this wall is the remnant foundation of the Franklin House, built in 1855 and destroyed by fire in 1872.

The second feature discovered is located just east of the eastern end of the brick wall. It was anticipated that a foundation corner would be located in this area and that a perpendicular brick wall representing the eastern wall of the Franklin House would extend from the corner. The E-W wall simply terminated however, and no perpendicular wall was located. As the area was excavated, unmodified waterworn cobbles were found (see Fig. 2). These stones ranged from fist-sized to much larger and were not in any obvious alignment, however as a group, they occur in the same projected alignment as the two structures to the west (the Franklin House and the Casa de Juan Rodriguez). These cobbles were all situated in a soil matrix that is very high in clay content. This type of soil was quite different from that above or adjacent to the brick wall, and also seemed to be present only in association with the cobbles. It is very likely that the cobbles represent a disturbed early foundation and the clay soil is a result of decomposed adobe bricks. In this light, the feature may represent the NE corner of the Colorado House.

The third feature was discovered at the base of a profile unit that was excavated adjacent to the inside of the brick wall approximately 3-8 meters east of the reconstructed Casa de Juan Rodriguez (see Figures 1 and 3). The unit was excavated by D. Foster and H. Price to expose a profile of the brick

wall. Approximately 3.5 inches southwest of the brick wall and 8 inches below the upper course of bricks, two large cobble stones were located and left in place (see attached photographs). There were also several (10-12) smaller cobbles above, below, and adjacent to them. Between the cobbles and the foundation was a mixture of reddish soil, brick fragments, charcoal and some plaster fragments. This soil was very similar to the clay soil found in the feature previously described. It was the same color as the surrounding soil, but was of a more even texture and lacked any brick or mortar rubble. The adobe soil was found four inches below the upper course of bricks and a thin layer of ash, plaster and charcoal rests on top of the adobe. Southwest of the two large cobbles appears to be pieces of melted adobe, perhaps from a wall. This feature may represent remnants of the earlier Exchange Hotel, an adobe structure built on this site previous to the three-story brick and wood Franklin House (Zink 1955).

## Artifact Descriptions

Artifact recovery was not a primary product of this dig. Approximately nine square meters (100 square feet) was excavated, but very little of this was dug down to the adobe-clay subsoil. The volume of soil moved and screened over a 1/4" mesh is estimated at a cubic meter. Other than window glass, no particular pattern was evident in the distribution of artifacts collected from along the foundation, within the profile test unit, and at the northeast corner. For simplicity the artifacts are described below without that provenience data. The field notes are on file with the Cultural Resource Management Section in Sacramento. The artifacts are on deposit in the park.

**Metals:** Twenty-three cut nails were found of at least four different sizes. All are badly rusted. Two are spikes; others are smaller and not easily identified by types. One wire nail entered the deposit sometime after 1950. One lump of rusted iron weighing three ounces could not be identified.

**Glass:** Over 100 fragments of window glass were found along the foundation as it was exposed. Most of these were melted and burned from the fire. Four different thicknesses were found varying from 1mm to 5mm. One fragment of an eight-sided clear glass drinking mug was found at the northeast corner. Fragments of 2 wine bottles, a beer bottle, a soda bottle (blue, embossed with "ER...") were also recovered. The lip of a small clear vessel may have been part of a perfume bottle. Seventeen other glass sherds include two with scalloped surfaces.

**Ceramics:** Thirteen fragments of cups and plates were recovered including fragments of earthenware, transferware, and ironstone. One porcelain knob fragment survived the fire. One piece of fine American-Made china was found with the Knowles, Taylor, and Knowles makers mark.

**Shell:** Twelve fragments of Pismo Clam and mussel shell were recovered. They represent local marine resource utilization by the Old Towners.

**Bone:** Of the 15 bone fragments collected one is probably cow, and all of them may be cow. All are mammal; none can be keyed as to genera.

**Bricks:** About 40 brick fragments were removed during excavation. They are described in the feature section above. An estimated 600 bricks are still mortared together in situ.

## Suggestions for future Research:

1. The width of the building is now known to have been 30' 9" along its front. The depth of the building has only been estimated from the record of property transfer dated July 19, 1855. The lot on which the Exchange Hotel once stood is described as "Having a front on the Plaza or public square of 35 feet more or less, and in depth 50 varas (Spanish measure) ..." (Book E, Page 328, Union Title Insurance Company Records, quoted in Zink (1955:56). However, the value of the vara has varied from 32" to 43". Using the shorter value would give a building lot 133' deep while the latter would yield a 179' lot. The house was probably closer to 140' in depth.

2. It remains to be seen whether foundations to the sidewalls also remain. According to the San Diego Herald of November 3, 1855 the Franklin brothers intended that "The lower story is to be of brick...". The 1973 excavations of Brandes and Moriarty revealed a portion of a brick sidewalk between the Franklin House and the Casa de Rodriguez. (See Figure No. 4 in the area from E-2 to G-2.) This walkway was at least seven bricks wide separating the two buildings. The southeast side may have shared a foundation or a wall with the two-story adobe Colorado House.
3. The original foundations to the Exchange Hotel may be lying adjacent to those for the Franklin House along San Diego Avenue and elsewhere. The large and small cobbles found inside the lowermost brick courses and some possible melted adobe fragments may represent previous construction. Zink (1955:54) mentions one account of an earthen floor which "would seem to suggest that it may have been adobe". The mystery remains as to whether people in 1855 saw the "raising and enlargement of the Exchange Estate by Messers Franklin"(Zink 1955:56) from what may have been a two-story adobe and wood structure or if, instead, the building was "razed" as was previously believed.
4. The artifactual deposits to be found within the Franklin House are probably unimpressive in quantity and quality when compared with those from the fill behind the hotel (Doug Flower and Linda Roth, personal communication). Nonetheless, they may provide valuable data on interior design and uses of space at the time of the 1872 fire. The level of the floor has yet to be determined. Interior walls may be discernible from burned beams and post molds or stoneworks. Analysis of artifact clusters may show which areas were used for the ballroom, a billiard-saloon, and the Overland Stage Company Office (since 1869, Moriarty 1973:24).

A new wing was added in 1869 to provide a total of 25 rooms (Moriarty 1973:23). Melted glass may also be found at the back of the structure. "The fine view of the San Diego River and Bay, often mentioned in newspaper articles of a later period, led to an assumption that similar rows of windows ran the length of each floor on the western side." (Moriarty (1973:9.)

5. A number of activities took place in back of the Franklin House which may still be evident today. A bath house, cook house, livery stable, and corrals were all constructed on the Bay side of the Franklin House (Moriarty 1973:10-11). Quantities of bone should also be found from the cows that were butchered to provide meat for patrons.

Actual excavation may show that other lines of inquiry should be pursued. The above mentioned topics are areas where archeological research could provide valuable information for authentic historic reconstruction and interpretation.

## Conclusions

A line of locally made (fired) bricks almost 31 feet long mark the location of the Franklin House facade. The types of nails, ceramic fragments, melted glass, and commercial grade glassware all corroborate the conclusion that this wall is the remnant foundation of the Franklin House, built in 1855 and destroyed by fire in 1872.

The first floor of the hotel was probably made of brick as the Franklin brothers intended. However, brick was not found for the sidewalls at the front corners. The possibility exists that the Franklin House had only a brick facade.

The evidence gathered to date indicates that a one or two story adobe structure called the Exchange Hotel stood on the exact same site from at least 1851 until 1855. The reuse of earlier materials, walls, and foundations is poorly understood. There are large and small cobblestones still in place in the adobe-clay soil which may have served as foundations for the Exchange Hotel and the neighboring Colorado House.

The artifacts recovered to date have limited interpretive or historical value. Caches of artifacts that survived the fire may yet be found elsewhere on the site. Less than 1% of the site has been excavated.

The excavation proved that a valuable historic resource could be identified, researched, and protected during construction activities without significant disruptions. The dig proved to be a very popular attraction to park visitors, staff, and local archeologists during its brief run. Future research at the Franklin House site promises to add valuable new data on the American period in Old Town San Diego.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank State Park Historian Alexandra Luberski whose concern for historical resources led to this report. Alexa recognized the probability of finding foundations at this location and the possibility that they could have been destroyed during the recontouring and repaving of San Diego Avenue. Her efforts in monitoring construction activities, assisting the excavation, and curating artifacts are very much appreciated.

Local archeologists Harry Price and Marj Stark helped with excavation of the foundation profile and description of the adobe feature found inside the wall. Area Manager, Jim Neal and Unit Supervisor Ken Leigh were helpful with local arrangements and by sharing a concern for resource protection with the park staff.

Construction Supervisor C. H. Riley and Inspector Arnold Triglia helped with this preservation effort by arranging for the backhoe to remove the old asphalt and by assisting with last minute design changes. And finally, we thank Geoffrey Mogilner, proprietor of the Racine and Laramie Tobacco Shop, for his interest in accurate archeological interpretation and historic reconstruction in Old Town San Diego State Historic Park.

The authors, of course, accept full responsibility for errors of fact and interpretation.

## References to the Franklin House

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Architectural-Historical Summaries for Sites and Structures, Old Town San Diego State Historic Park. Unpublished manuscript. Sausalito, California, 1968.
- Zink, Orion M.  
1955 "The Exchange Hotel", pp. 54-56 in Places at Old Town San Diego. Unpublished manuscript, Title Insurance and Trust Company, San Diego.

Table 1

Measurements of Foundation Features

Foundation width (4 bricks wide) measures 16" (41cm).  
 Brick width varies from 3-3/4" to 4-1/4"; most are 4" wide.  
 Brick length varies from 7-3/4" to 8-1/4"; most are 8" long.

<u>Distances from datum to:</u>	<u>Feet</u>	<u>Inches</u>	<u>Meters</u>
First perpendicular brick	9	-	2.74
Center of profile unit	12	6	3.8
Second perpendicular brick	23	2	6.08
End of foundation wall	30	9	9.38
End of cobble foundation for Colorado House	36		11.0

Depth of the top course of the brick foundation measured from the adjacent surface contour: Meters southeast of

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	+3cm	-2	-16	-18	-19	-20	-16	-19	-18

\* Datum is the northeast corner of the reconstructed Casa de Rodriguez.

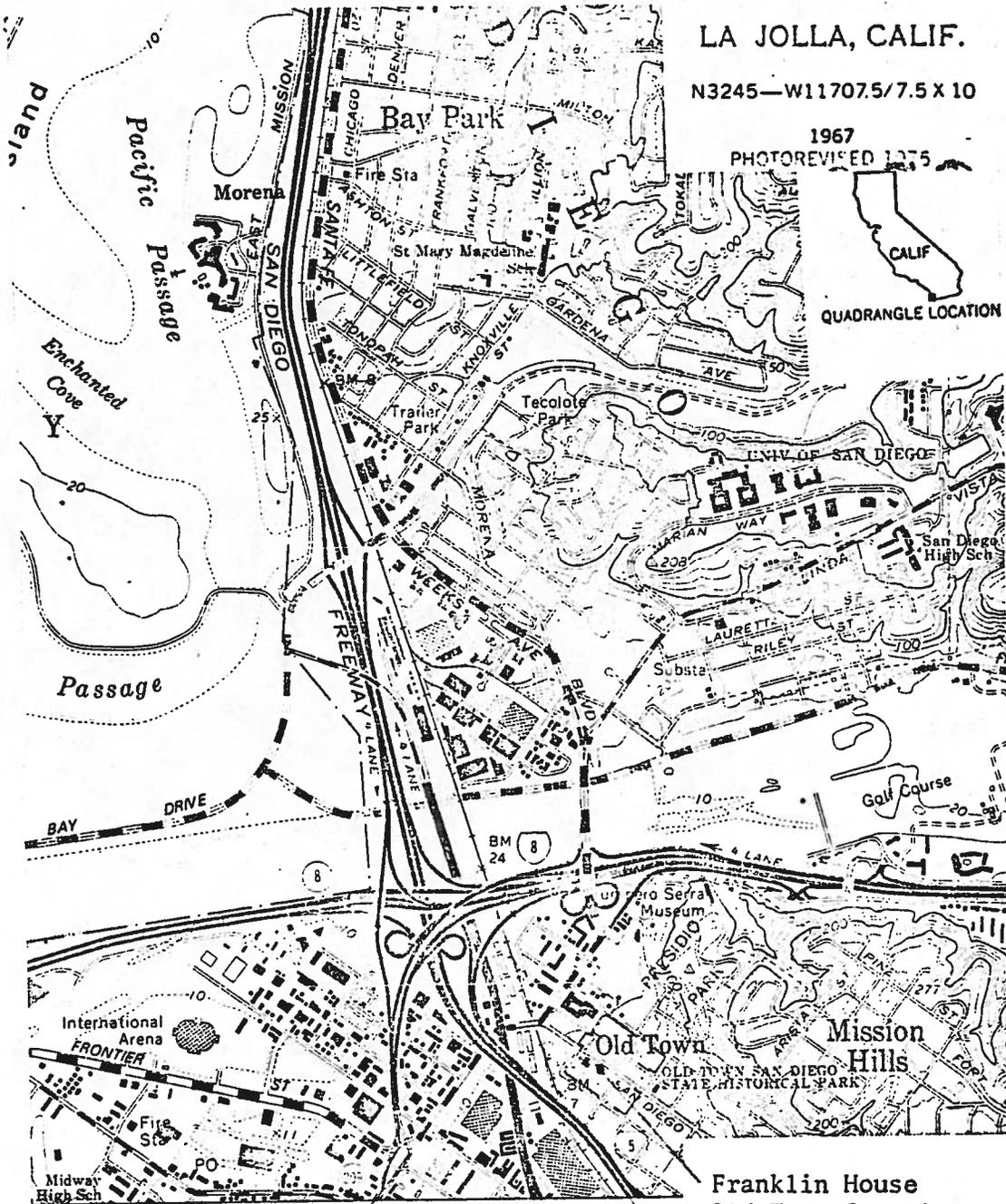
C-0527L

LA JOLLA, CALIF.

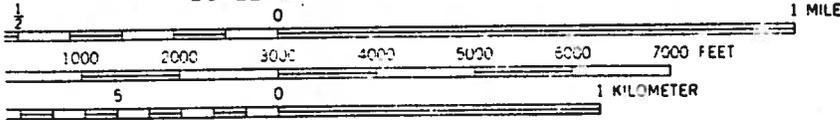
N3245—W11707.5/7.5 X 10

1967  
PHOTOREVISED 1975

QUADRANGLE LOCATION



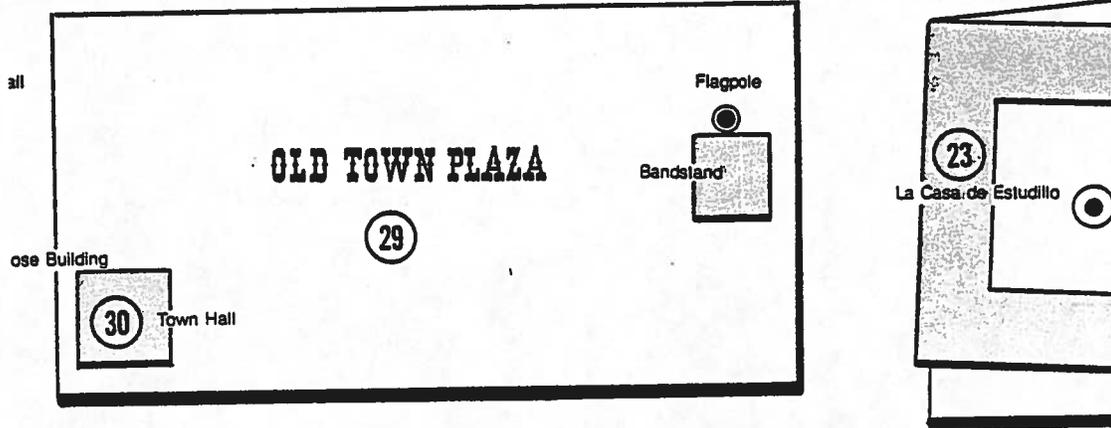
12'30" (POINT LOMA)  
CABRILLO NAT. MONUMENT 7 MI. 2549 II NW  
SCALE 1:24 000



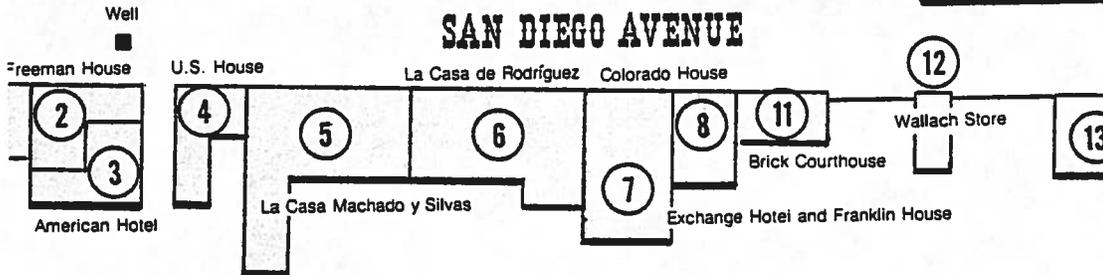
CONTOUR INTERVAL 20 FEET  
DOTTED LINES REPRESENT 10-FOOT CONTOURS

Franklin House  
Old Town San Diego  
State Historic Park

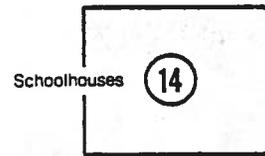
FITCH STREET [COURT LANE]



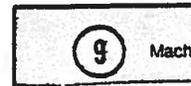
SAN DIEGO AVENUE



Ward



La Casa de Valdez-Reyes

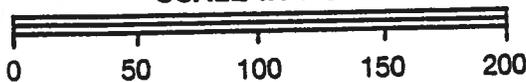


Machado-Stewart House

# OLD TOWN circa 1869

Prepared to accompany: OLD TOWN, SAN DIEGO  
1821-1874, A BRIEF HISTORY AND  
DESCRIPTIVE GUIDE TO HISTORIC SITES

SCALE IN FEET



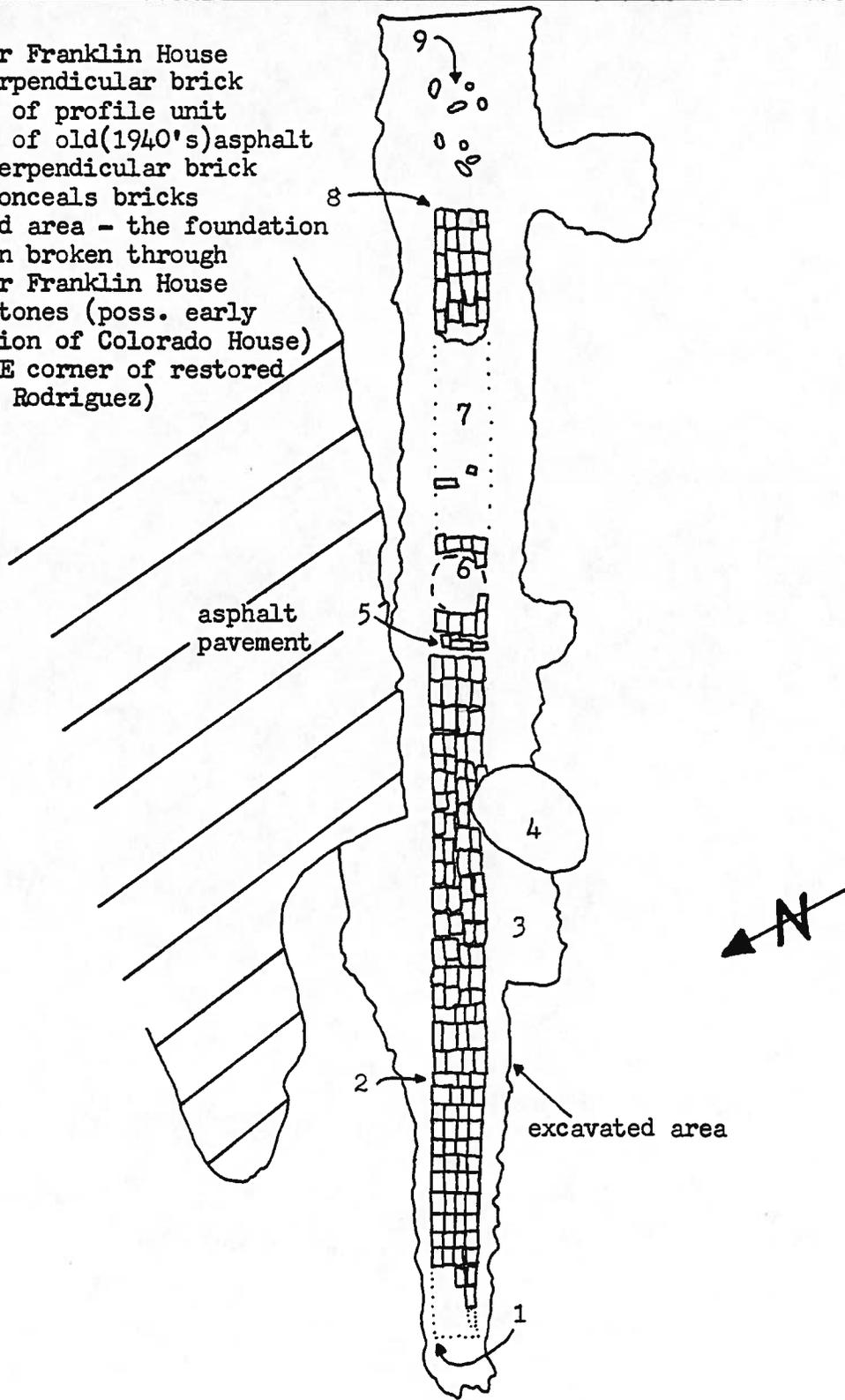
Map Drawn by Thomas L. Scharf

Copyright 1976 by ALCALÁ PRESS



- 1 = NW corner Franklin House
- 2 = first perpendicular brick
- 3 = location of profile unit
- 4 = fragment of old(1940's) asphalt
- 5 = second perpendicular brick
- 6 = mortar conceals bricks
- 7 = disturbed area - the foundation has been broken through
- 8 = NE corner Franklin House
- 9 = cobble stones (poss. early foundation of Colorado House)
- △ = datum (NE corner of restored Casa de Rodriguez)

San Diego Avenue



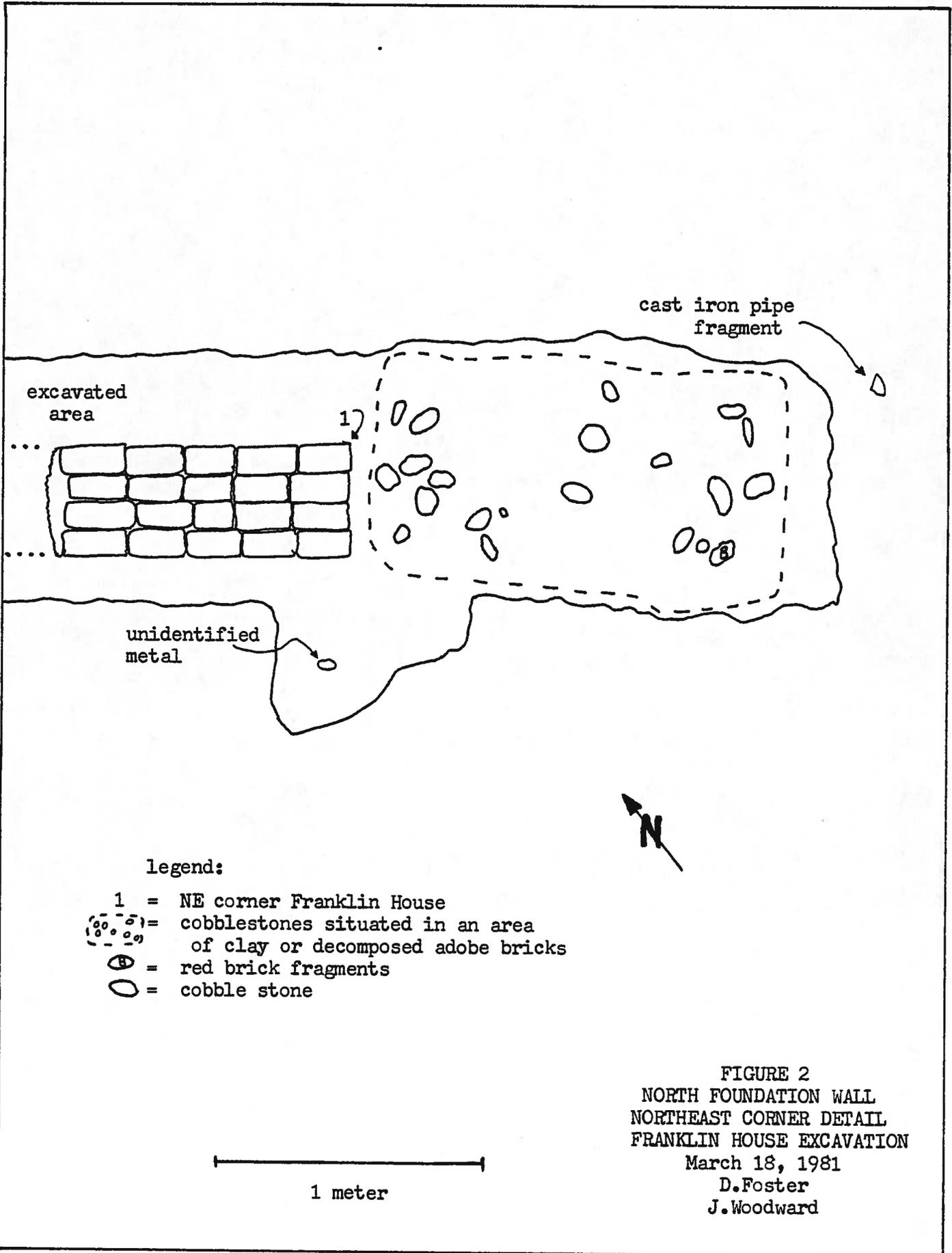
□ porch post

\* see photographs for a more accurate view of brick arrangement

△ Casa de Rodriguez

1 meter

FIGURE 1  
 NORTH FOUNDATION WALL  
 FRANKLIN HOUSE EXCAVATION  
 March 18, 1981  
 D.Foster  
 J.Woodward



excavated  
area

cast iron pipe  
fragment

unidentified  
metal

legend:

- 1 = NE corner Franklin House
- (○) = cobbles situated in an area  
of clay or decomposed adobe bricks
- (R) = red brick fragments
- (○) = cobble stone

FIGURE 2  
NORTH FOUNDATION WALL  
NORTHEAST CORNER DETAIL  
FRANKLIN HOUSE EXCAVATION  
March 18, 1981  
D. Foster  
J. Woodward

1 meter

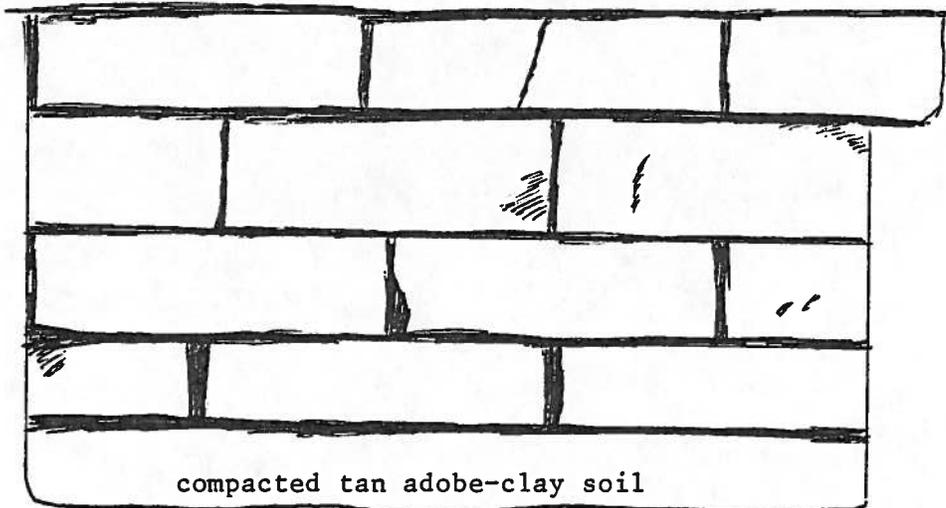


7 cm (2 3/4")

asphalt - SAN DIEGO AVENUE

fill material

13 cm (5 1/8")



28 cm (11")

not

compacted tan adobe-clay soil

14 cm (3")

excavated

10 cm



View NE (035)

Note: scattered charcoal adheres to the bricks and mortar.

Figure 3  
Profile View of the Brick Foundation  
Franklin House, Old Town San Diego

# CASA DE JUAN RODRIGUEZ

## SITE PLAN

MARCH 1973

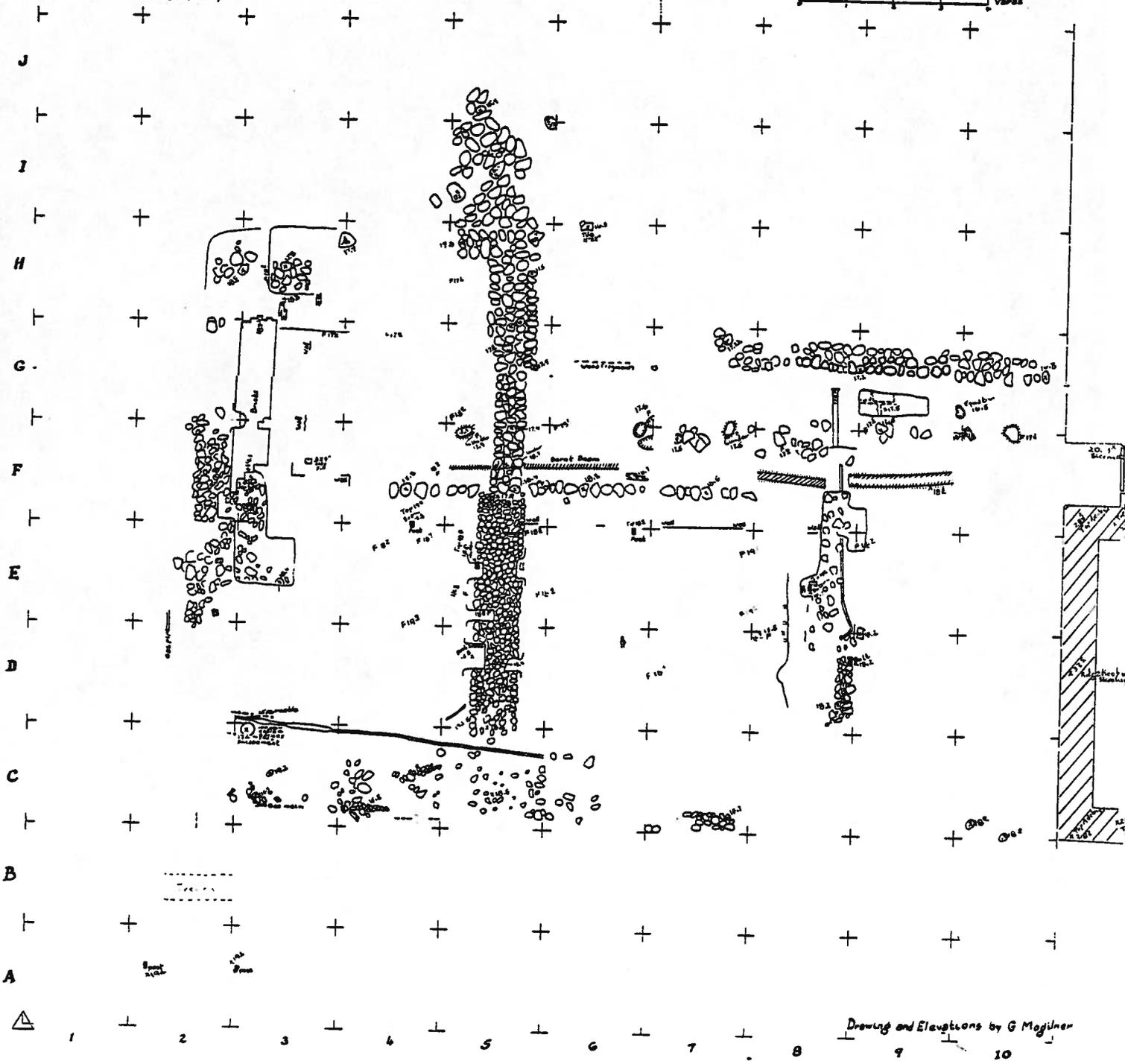
-  Foundations, Clasts from Poley formation Higher stone
-  Floor-Tile
-  Bricks
-  Timber Fragments
-  Sawn Posts in Place
-  Adobe Block Wall
-  Adobe Blocks
-  Sewer Pipe Gas Pipe

Datum City Marker, N.W. corner S.D. Ave +  
Mason St 25.076' M.S.L.  
X Spot Elevation  
F Floor Level to <sup>1/2"</sup> Bottom of carbon

-  Pit
-  Underground Electric
-  Concrete Encased
-  Telephone Cable

-  Base Point Grid Reference
-  Grid Point
-  Indurated Adobe soil Charcoal & Ash
-  Rock indurated at bottom
-  Rock indurated at equator

Scale 4"=1'  

Drawing and Elevations by G. Magilner

\*Elevations off by a systematic error\*

State of California - The Resources Agency  
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

HISTORIC ARCHEOLOGICAL SITE/FEATURE SURVEY RECORD

1. Site Franklin House 2. Feature brick wall foundation
3. Park Unit Old Town San Diego SHP 4. County San Diego
5. Twp. 16S Range 3W ; - % of - % of Sec. -
6. UTM Coordinates 3,263,840 m N; 481, 540 m E Zone 11 7. Elevation 20'
8. Location (Legal) "Having a Front on the Plaza or public square of 35 feet more or less, and in depth 50 varas, ... as part of Lot 2 in Block 30 ... "July 19, 1855, Union Title Insurance Co.
9. Descriptive Location Along San Diego Avenue, south of the Plaza, adjacent - east of the reconstructed La Casa de Juan Rodriguez. About half of this site is now occupied by the Hawtree Trading Post, 2731 San Diego Avenue.
10. Description (Size, Configuration, Layout, etc.) Brick foundation to the front wall of the Franklin House facing San Diego Avenue; 4 bricks wide, 4 to 5 brick courses deep mortared together and nearly continuous for a distance of 9.38 meters (30' 9") measuring SE from the corner of the reconstructed Casa de Rodriguez. The 20+ Cobbles found beyond the brick foundation may be the foundation to the northwest corner of the Colorado House built of adobe.
11. Associated Artifacts 7 cut nail frags., 1 wire nail; 15 bone frags. (cow?); 11 ceramic sherds incl. earthenware, ironstone ware, a Knowles Taylor & Knowles plate frag., porcelain knob frag.; 12 shell frags.; 120 + glass frags. (window, bottle).
12. Condition/Recommendations Foundations have integrity of location, about 70% continuity on front wall with at least some associated artifactual debris. Recommend preservation until excavation is needed prior to reconstruction.
13. Date of Construction 1855 (      Estimated; X Documented;      Unknown)
14. Original Appearance/Modifications Also the site of the Exchange Hotel, circa 1851 to 1855, State Historic Landmark #491. The San Diego Herald, on November 3, 1855, reported "The lower story is to be of brick, fronted by a handsome veranda which will be carried up three stories, the height of the building." (quoted in Zink 1955)
15. Ownership/Use See S.K. Moriarty (1973) for documented historical ownership and uses.
16. References (Documents, Photos, Oral History) S.K. Moriarty (1973), Orion Zink (1950), Engstrand and Brandes (1976), Brandes and Moriarty (1973), Clyde Trudell (n.d.), T.W. Jordan (n.d.), Winfield Davidson (1931).
17. Recorded By Jim Woodward, Dan Foster, Alexa Luberski Date March 16-18, 1981  
Harry Price

18. Accession No. \_\_\_\_\_ 19. Previous Survey Designation Franklin House  
 20. Photo Roll No. \_\_\_\_\_ Frame No. \_\_\_\_\_ Film Type B&W By D. Foster

FEATURE CHECK LIST: (Discuss Significant Elements on Reverse)

21. No. of Buildings Represented: One  
 Residence  Privy  Blacksmith  
 Root Cellar/Dug Out  Shop/Outbuildings  Mill  
 Store - Hotel

22. Surface Modifications:  
 Dam  Mound  Shaft  Well  
 Depression  Pit  Terrace  
 Ditch  Retaining Wall  Trenches for utilities  
 Embankment  Road San Diego  Tunnel

23. Architectural Elements:  
 Addition  Foundations  Siding  Bridge  
 Cellar  Joists  Walkway  
 Fireplace  Patio/Pavement  Wall  
 Floor  Roofing  Machine Mounts

24. Cellar:  
 Pit Only Pit Lined With: \_\_\_\_\_ Wood; \_\_\_\_\_ Stone; \_\_\_\_\_ Concrete  
 Stairs \_\_\_\_\_ Ground Level Entrance; From the \_\_\_\_\_  
 Remains of Doorway Present: \_\_\_\_\_ Wood; \_\_\_\_\_ Iron

25. Nails: \_\_\_\_\_ Hand Forged  Cut (square) \_\_\_\_\_ Wire (round)  
 Other Hardware \_\_\_\_\_

26. Lumber Dimensions: \_\_\_\_\_

27. Brick Dimensions, Brands: 8" x 4" x 2 3/4", with some size and color irregularities.

28. Foundation:  
 Stone  Brick  Wood  Concrete  
 Mortared  Unmortared  Post  Pier  
 70% Continuous  Sill  Skid

29. Utilities (Plumbing, Wiring, Utilities Poles, etc.) Recent intrusions, mapped.

30. Introduced (Exotic) Vegetation: None - Sand from Silver Strand SB was placed over the foundation as a protective covering at the end of the excavation.

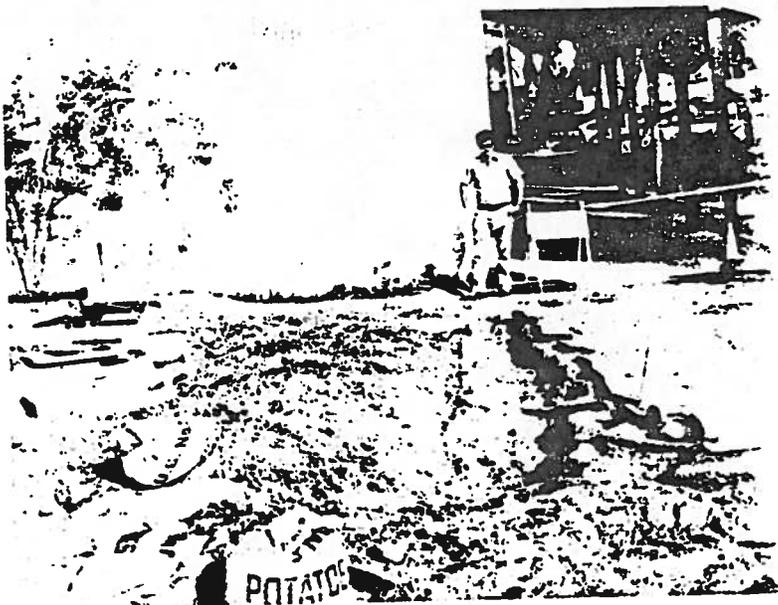
31. Natural Vegetation None remaining.

32. Soil/Archeological Deposits (Color, Texture, Depth, etc.) 10 YR 4/4 dry "strong brown" uniform color throughout with areas of ash and charcoal.

INCLUDE LOCATION MAP AND PLAN OF FEATURE ON ACCOMPANYING SHEET(S)



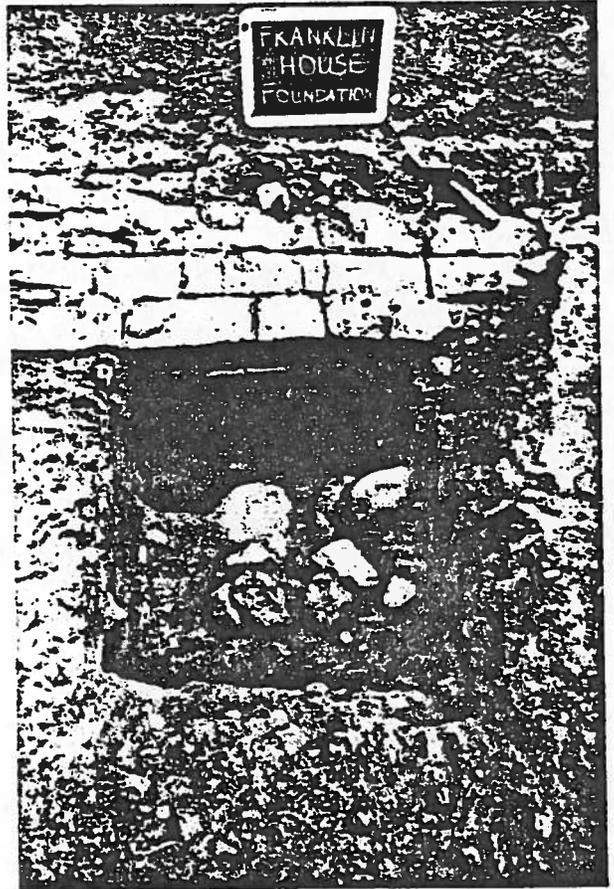
Franklin House Foundation  
Old Town San Diego State Historic Park



Jim Woodward brushes the foundations next to the Casa de Rodriguez (top photos).

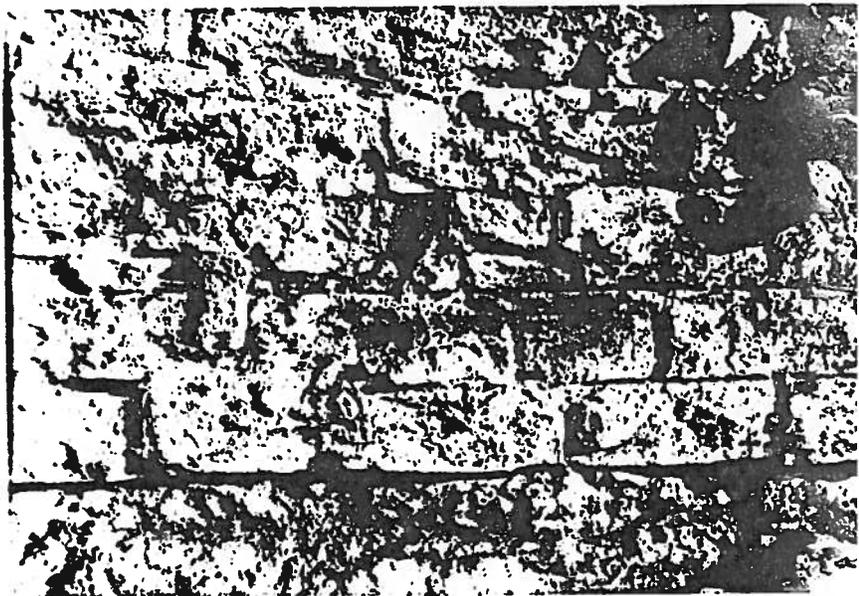
Beginning of work, left. Asphalt removed from over foundations, area marked off.

Franklin House Foundations  
 Old Town San Diego State Historic Park

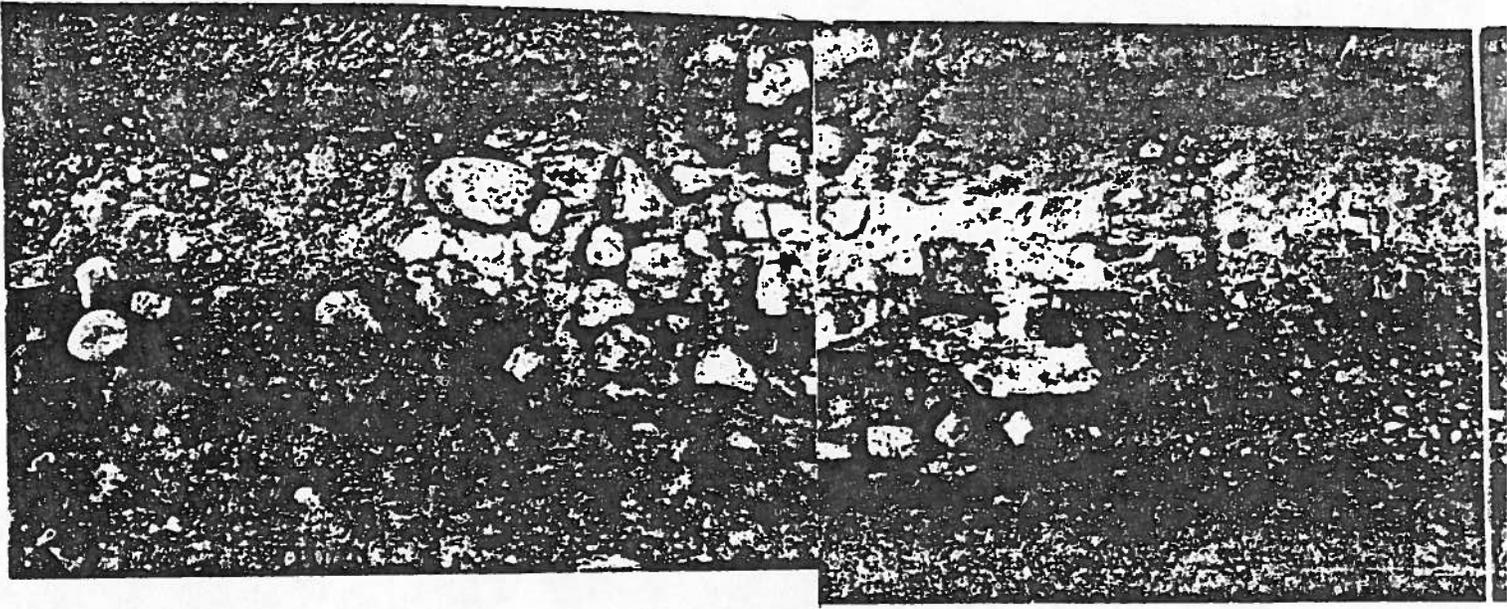


Wide angle views of foundations  
 top left: looking southeast  
 top right: foundation profile  
 and adjacent test pit  
 bottom right: detail of  
 four-brick-wide foundation.

ONE KNOWLES TAYLOR  
 KNOWLES PLATE FRAGMENT  
 BELOW

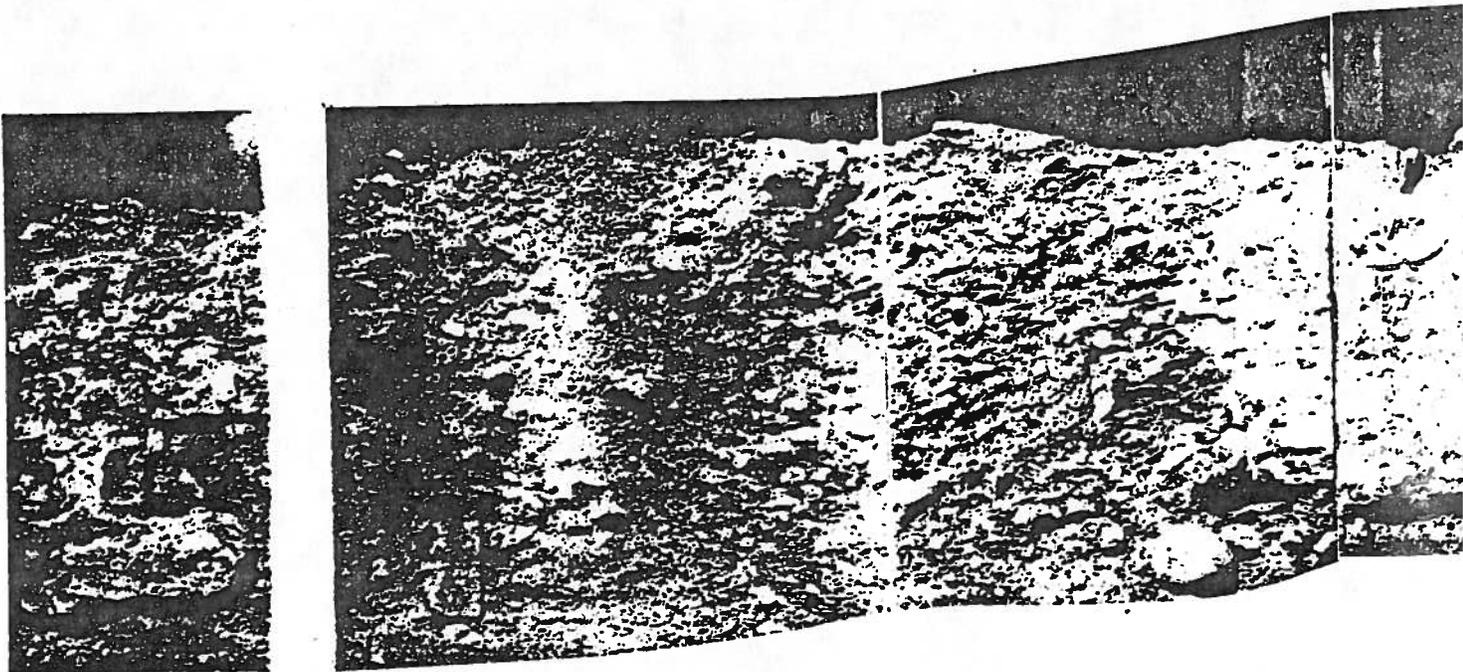


Franklin House Foundations  
Old Town San Diego, State Historic Park



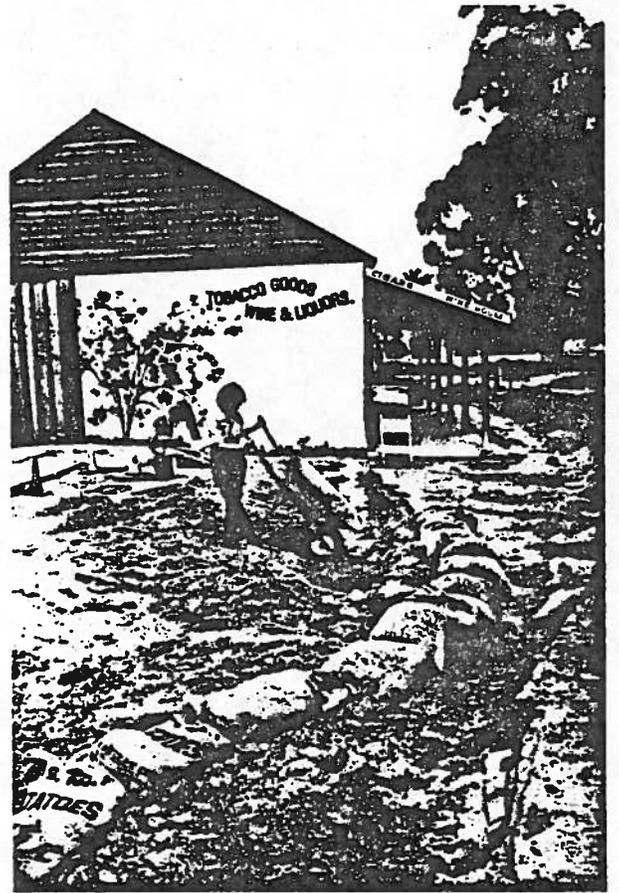
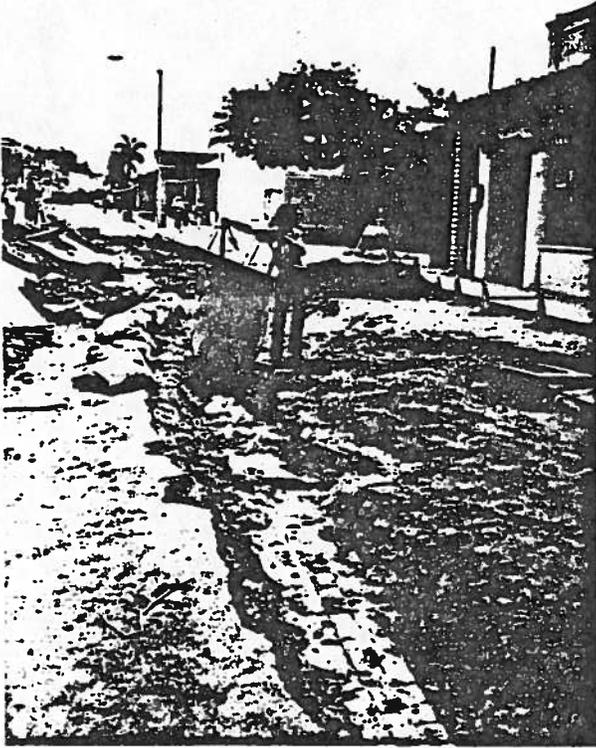
35 mm wide-angle photographs taped together of the 31 foot long foundation.

Note cobbles at left of photo in line with the Franklin House foundations which the investigators believe are the foundations to the adobe Colorado House. It also appears that cobbles were used as a foundation for the wall between these two buildings, though exposure of this feature was limited to the extent shown in the photo.



50 mm "normal lens" photographs taped together, incomplete on the left-hand or southeastern side.

Franklin House Foundations  
Old Town San Diego State Historic Park



Alexa Luberski dumps sand over the foundations, while Dan Foster takes notes in background, top left. Beach sand from Silver Strand State Beach was placed over the brickwork to mark and protect this historic building feature.



Franklin House Foundations  
Old Town San Diego State Historic Park

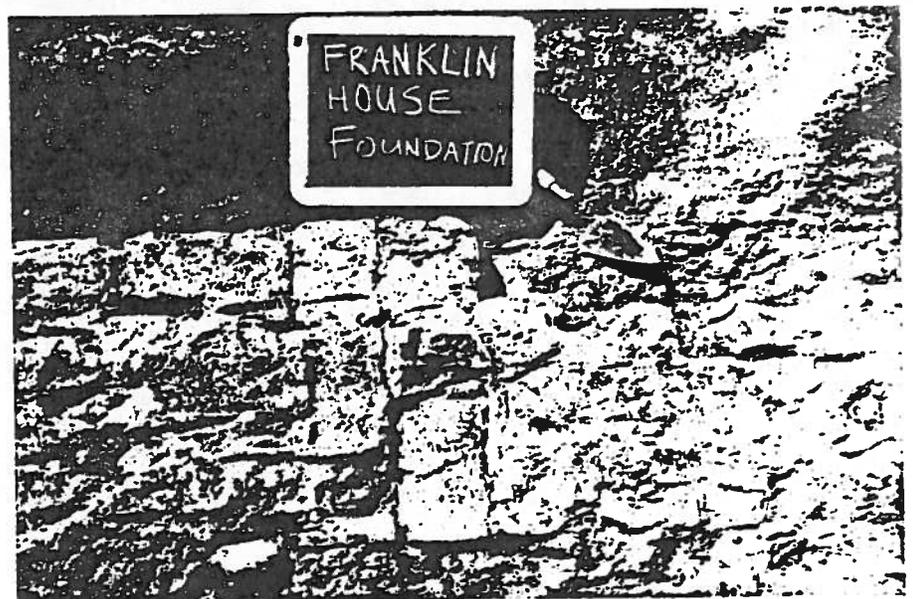
Jim Woodward takes notes  
while bulldozers pile  
asphalt debris behind  
him on San Diego Avenue.



One profile of the brick  
foundations was exposed  
by H. Price showing four  
courses intact.



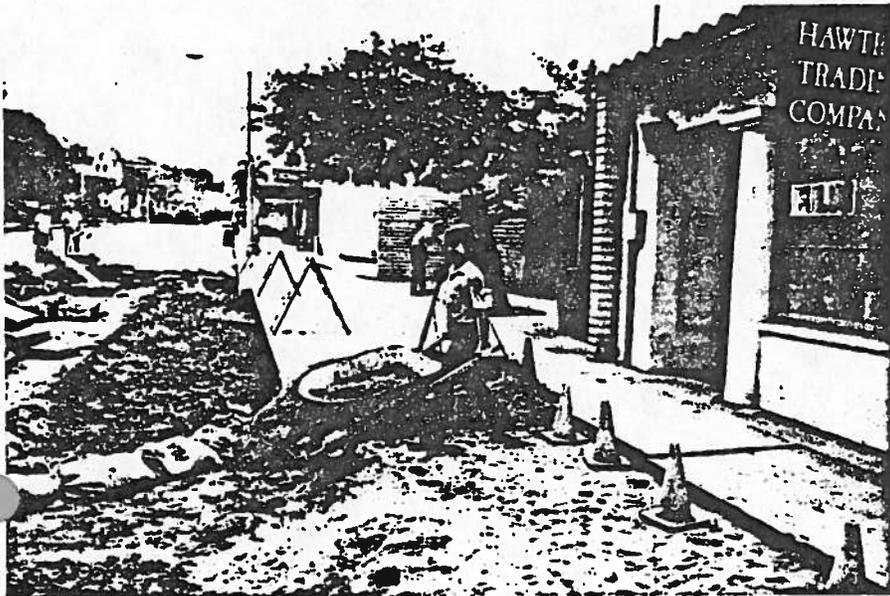
Detail of foundation  
showing vertically  
alligned bricks which  
probably marked the  
placement of internal  
walls.



# NEWS & VIEWS

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## department of parks & recreation



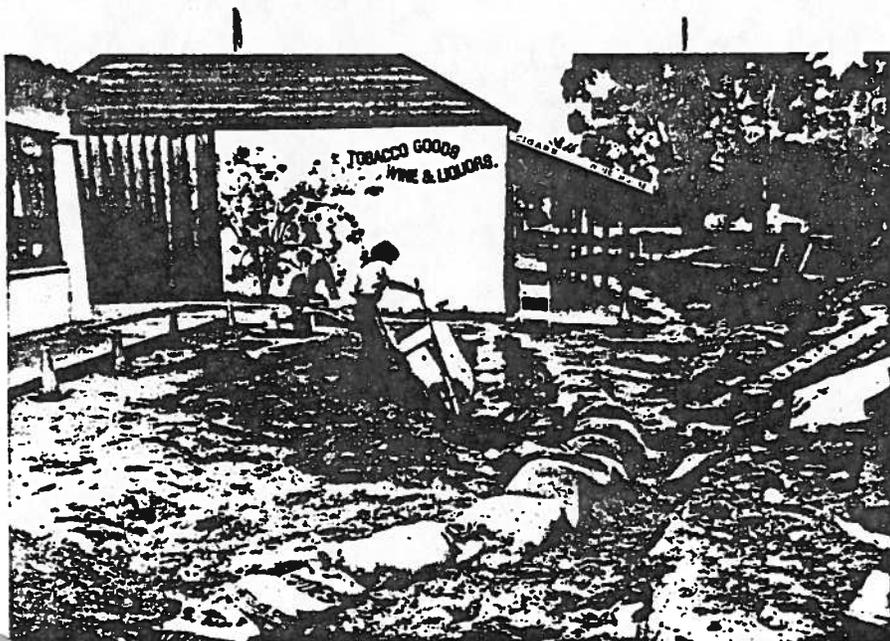
### *Franklin House Foundation Located*

DPR Archeologists Jim Woodward and Dan Foster recently found the exact location of the front of the historic Franklin House in Old Town SD.

They found it by uncovering a line of locally made bricks, four wide and four deep, and 31 feet long, a few inches below the present grade of San Diego Avenue across from the Plaza.

The Franklin House, built in 1855, was a three-story hotel with shops and offices — the most important building on the Plaza and the first “high-rise” in San Diego.

State Historian Alexa Luberski said, “This find is valuable not only for historic research but also for planning authentic reconstruction of the Franklin House.”



*Alexa Luberski working on Franklin House dig.*