

Childhood Depictions
Creating an Historical Archaeology of Children and Childhood on the Ranchos de Taos Plaza, New Mexico

B. Sunday Eiselt
Department of Anthropology

Each of us was once a child and it is impossible to imagine a society without children. Yet children have been notably absent from archaeological narratives, particularly in the Spanish borderlands where they generally appear as victims of slavery and boarding schools (Brooks 2002; Lindauer 1997; Parker 1996; Trennert 1988, see also Hecht 2002). This proposal seeks funding to expand our understanding of the rich and varied lives of children in the Spanish borderlands through archaeological examination on the Ranchos de Taos Plaza of northern New Mexico. Specifically, I am requesting funds to conduct background archival research on the history, activities, and material culture of northern Rio Grande Hispanic children and the American educational system that served them. This research will provide baseline data for the development of archaeological research that I am currently conducting as the director of the SMU-in-Taos archaeology field school. Background research is essential to this project, but requires extensive travel to national and regional archives and the compilation and analysis of photographs, documents, and collections pertinent to childhood research. Children do not write their own memoirs, so the most fruitful body of archival materials for children, particularly contexts relevant to archaeology, are photographs and documents pertaining to their education. This information will assist us in developing a methodology for examining children archaeologically and interpreting our finds in the field.

Project Background

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Ranchos de Taos Plaza is one of the oldest and most picturesque of the Colonial Hispanic villages of the northern Rio Grande. Built during the 1790s, the Saint Francis of Assisi Church is the focal point of the village. Every year thousands of tourists, artists, and worshipers flock to the village hoping to be temporarily transported to a time when horse-drawn carriages, the haunting *Alabados* (hymns) and *Corridos* (ballads) of Catholic worshipers, and the excited sounds of children's play reverberated through the back lots and corners of these now crumbling adobes. But children are notably absent from the plaza today. The transformation of the village to a tourist attraction has led to high property values as families have been gradually forced to move to the outskirts of town. Many in the village see this loss and the reduction of the plaza to a tourism town as part of a broader process of American imperial expansion. Despite the acknowledged benefits of a public education system, they feel that the introduction of a wage labor economy, the influx of American trade, and the imposition of the American educational ideals by the turn of the 19th-century has led to major changes in child-rearing practices and widespread misconceptions about traditional religious values, most notably the flagellant practices of Los Hermanos Penitentes. The Penitente emerged in the rural *mestizo* communities of New Mexico following the secularization of the Roman Catholic Church after Mexico's independence from Spain. Although *Los Hermanos* continue to worship in private, the lay brotherhood is interested in using archaeology to correct popular misconceptions of their religious practices, the role of women and children in the perpetuation of their religious lives, and their history in northern New Mexico.

We have worked closely with this community over the past two field seasons to develop an archaeology of the plaza that is socially relevant and responsive to local heritage concerns. In this way, the SMU-in-Taos campus is transforming the archaeology of the region to include underrepresented groups and

hidden histories of the valley. In 2008, we began to realize that children as a distinctive cultural group remained relatively ignored in historical narratives of the region. As our excavations uncovered more and more evidence of children the Lay Brotherhood and priests overseeing our work urged us to pay greater attention to their lives, stating that we can not tell the story of the plaza without first telling the story of its children. This view is consistent with traditional Catholic values that place children and images of the infant Christ at the forefront of religious practice in daily life. By the end of our 2008 field season we understood how a study focused on the material expressions of childhood would enable us to formulate a new narrative of the plaza and the region that considers the consequences and long-term impacts of American capitalism and the public school system on rural *Taos* identity.

Although the archaeology of childhood is currently growing, most studies are based on attenuated material records (see Sofaer Derevenski 2000 and references therein). Children's activities can be difficult to detect in archaeological excavations and children's artifacts often constitute only a minor portion of most artifact assemblages. This is not the case at the Ranchos de Taos Plaza. Over the past two field seasons, we have recovered hundreds of children's items dating from the mid-1800s to the present. These include miniaturized stone grinding tools (for grinding wheat or corn); hand made clay toys; depression era tea sets, doll parts, jacks and marbles, clothing parts, mechanical train parts, and child care implements; and modern plastic Leggos, Barbie doll parts, action figures, and plastic and metal pendants, beads, and jewelry of all kinds. Mixed with these assemblages are pencil fragments, pencil lead, chalk, and crayons. These artifacts reveal different aspects of children's lives including work, play, and education. To date, most items have been recovered from household excavation units where the owners and other elders have been available to provide interpretations, recollections, and stories related to their childhood on the plaza. In 2009 we will expand our excavations to include the historic Catholic school, now closed, that is adjacent to the plaza and we will document historic trash dumps in the Parish where we have found child-related artifacts associated with houses. Children are well-represented in the archaeological record, and this underscores the general belief of the villagers that the archaeology of childhood is key to understanding the history of the village, the impacts of American consumerism, and the transition from Catholic to public education with its unintended effects.

The history of childhood education in Taos dates back to the first Catholic school, opened in the home of Fray Antonio Martínez in 1826 (Sánchez 1940:50). Although the American public schools gradually replaced the older Catholic institutions starting the late 1800s, Catholic nuns and priests remained in control of the classrooms until the end of the Great Depression (Gallegos 1992; Getz 1997). Childhood education became a major issue of contention following the Depression-era social protest scholarship of George Sánchez and his 1940 publication "Forgotten People: A Study of New Mexicans". Using Taos as a case study, Sánchez argued that the Anglo educational system discriminated against Spanish-speaking children, while federal and state land policy economically strangled New Mexican families. As women became increasingly associated with the domestic and village spheres and men with the public and commercial, the ways in which children were raised and socialized also changed.

The archaeology of children on the plaza investigates these changes through examination of the nature and distribution of their artifacts over time. We expect that major changes in parenting and education are accompanied by changes in the material records of children and the kinds of places or spaces that are associated with their activities. In particular, increased access to education and commercially produced children's products through the cash economy should lead to a proliferation of children's toys, care items, clothing and other educational implements. We also should see a transformation in the types of games that children played, from a focus on communal to individual play, as well as increased evidence for play overall as children spent less time working along side adults and more time socializing

at school and at home. Finally, the distribution of children's artifacts, as a reflection of the places they created for themselves and those that were specifically designated for them, should also change as children's activities were increasingly structured by competing priorities for their time. Changes in the nature and distribution of children's artifacts will provide important information about the impact of American institutions on child rearing, the allocation of family resources, and the proper "place" of children in society (Baxter 2005). This information, although specific to the plaza, has broader implications for understanding the effects of American contact on rural families of the New Mexico borderlands.

Objectives

Archaeology is particularly well-suited to explore these issues, but must include a methodology that incorporates information from multiple and complementary sources such as photographs, artistic or symbolic representations, and documents. The objectives of the project help to establish this methodology. These objectives include the following.

1. Examination of photographs will provide important contextual information about the material culture, ways of dress, and interactions that are pertinent to the socialization process and the tasks, activities, and objects that were considered important in raising children. Photographic analysis will provide critical data that enables us to link child-related objects, recovered archaeologically, to specific gendered activities in work and play.
2. Information on depictions of children in symbolic media such as sculpture or paintings will help to establish recurring themes, associations, and subjects that are generated by adults to convey particular messages about children in society. These messages may be very different from the lived experiences of children that are represented archaeologically.
3. Documents and archives will provide additional information about the management of children by state and family institutions. Examination of these institutions will enable us to link changes in artifact patterns to the specific policies and practices of child-rearing and socialization.

The data generated through this study will be compared to archaeological findings and oral testimony from the plaza. By combining these different resources and objectives, we will be able to reconstruct a more comprehensive dialog about childhood and education that includes children's voices and not just those of adults. Background research also will help me to establish an appropriate work plan and design for archaeological site sampling and excavation. Finally, the photographs, documents, and representations gathered from archival sources will augment oral interviews with residents on the plaza. Photographs in particular are well-suited for eliciting information about childhood memories and will be used extensively in interviews.

Plan of Work

Research will take place over the course of 2009 and will include visits to major archival holdings in Washington D.C., Denver, Colorado, and Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and Taos in New Mexico.

1. *Washington, D. C.:* The Library of Congress and Smithsonian Institution maintain photographic holdings dating from the 1850s to the 1960s including photographs of New Mexico subjects from the Works Progress Administration and Farm Security Administration. On-line research

has already revealed hundreds of photographs of children and additional research is required to examine selected collections for the Taos area. Research will involve a 5-day trip in March of 2009 to examine and obtain relevant photographs.

2. *Denver, Colorado:* The National Archives Rocky Mountain Division is the primary repository for federal documents dating from 1847 to the 1990s. Photographic collections and documents pertaining to New Mexico Hispanic homesteading, and U.S. territorial education policies are included. Research will involve a 5-day trip in May of 2009 to examine and obtain relevant documents and photographs.
3. *Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and Taos New Mexico:* The Center For Southwest Research (University of New Mexico, Albuquerque), the State Records Center and Archives (Santa Fe), the Southwest Research Center of Northern New Mexico (Taos) and the Kit Carson Historical Museum (Taos) contain historic documents and photographs pertaining to public and Catholic schools in New Mexico in addition to extensive photographic collections for Taos and the northern Rio Grande. Research will involve a three week trip in July of 2009 to examine and obtain relevant documents and photographs.

Documents pertaining to the history of the education system in New Mexico will be collected and digitized to create an archive for the SMU-in-Taos Childhood Archaeology Project. These documents will serve as critical resources for project development and dissemination in the form of peer reviewed publications and manuscripts. Additional funds are required to obtain high quality digital images of selected photographs of Hispanic and Native American children. Photographs will be systematically analyzed through the creation of a database that includes observations on the contexts, activities, associations, and material culture of children. Native American and Euro-American subjects will be included to provide cross-cultural information on childhood in northern New Mexico for comparison to archaeological materials. Initial research with on-line photographic collections indicates that this database will include hundreds of photographs dating from the 1850s to the 1960s. The photographic database will be the first of its kind and will lead to publications in History and Anthropology journals.

Digitized collections will be shared with the local museums, archives, and families of Taos as part of this project. Photographs will also be used to facilitate oral interviews and analysis of archaeological materials.

Project Significance

Despite cross-cultural variation in what constitutes adolescent development, childhood is a category unique to the human species and common to all human societies, making children appropriate and relevant topics for anthropological and archaeological inquiry (Baxter 2005; Olwig and Guløvn 2003; Sofaer Derevenski 2000). Yet for many years, children have been considered peripheral to traditional interests of archaeological research, particularly in the Spanish borderlands. This project helps to redress the omission of children from archaeological research and increases our competence in recognizing children in the material record by placing them at the center of archaeological inquiry. Through the integration of documentary and material evidence, this project will create important new narratives about children and develop new theoretical and methodological approaches to study them as active participants in past cultures. By acknowledging that children are embedded in adult discourses surrounding economy and education, this study also will provide new insights into the historical

consequences of American occupation of the Southwest on rural families who still struggle with these issues today.

Project Relevance

Although archaeological studies of the impacts of American institutions on indigenous communities in the Spanish borderlands are relatively common, few of them have investigated the ways in which culture contact has shaped children's lives. As a living village, established and occupied since the 1790s, the Ranchos de Taos Plaza provides a rare opportunity to undertake a longitudinal study of these impacts up to the modern era. The establishment of a comprehensive documentary archive pertaining to children is essential to this project. Archival research will assist in the development of a methodology for the study of childhood that incorporates multiple lines of evidence for the interpretation of archaeological findings. It will enable us to establish a robust archaeological research design for the study of childhood and will facilitate the interpretation of archaeological results. This archive will be shared with members of the Taos community and will guide oral history interviews. The photographic analysis will enable us to establish a comprehensive picture of childhood dating from the 1850s to the modern era, worthy of publication in its own right.

Conclusion

Children are present in all aspects of the archaeological record, but identifying their presence and understanding what their remains will tell us have long been considered difficult undertakings with uncertain rewards. The development of a methodology that incorporates documentary, visual, and oral testimony promises to overcome these limitations. Combined with the rich artifact assemblage of child-specific objects that we have seen and recovered from the plaza, this methodology will provide new interpretations about the impacts of American capitalism and the education system on rural Hispanic villages and child-rearing practices. In the Spanish borderlands, children have been largely cast as victims of state sponsored policies and institutions. The SMU-in-Taos Childhood Archaeology Project instead seeks to build a better understanding of children's lives by placing them at the center of research through examination of documents, photographs, archaeological materials, and oral history at the Ranchos de Taos Plaza.

The archaeology project is a community based investigation being conducted as part of the SMU-Taos program in archaeology, which provides hands-on training in archaeological theory, method, and technique in a summer field school format available to undergraduate and graduate students of SMU. The archival research proposed as part of this project is essential to this program and will further enhance our educational and community outreach goals.

I began this work on the Ranchos de Taos Plaza as a Visiting Assistant Professor in the SMU Department of Anthropology, and for the past two field seasons the SMU-in-Taos archaeology field school has conducted preliminary excavations and interviews with local residents to develop archaeological programming that is responsive to local heritage needs. This work has paid off. Now that I am a tenure-track Assistant Professor, the project is sufficiently developed to pursue external funding. A Faculty Research Grant would greatly facilitate archaeological research and provide additional enhancement to pursue external funds from the National Geographic Society, and the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research.

Reference Cited

- Baxter, Jane E.
2005 *The Archaeology of Childhood: Children, Gender, and Material Culture*. Altamira Press, Walnut Creek, California.
- Brooks, James F. *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press, 2002), Chapel Hill, North Carolina.
- Gallegos, Bernardo P.
1992 *Literacy, Education, and Society in New Mexico: 1693-1821*. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque.
- Getz, Lynne M.
1997 *Schools of Their Own: The Education of Hispanos in New Mexico, 1850-1940*. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque.
- Hecht, Tobias (editor)
2002 *Minor Omissions: Children in Latin American History and Society*. The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison.
- Lindauer, Owen
1997 *Not for School, but for Life: Lessons from the Historical Archaeology of the Phoenix Indian School (Office of Cultural Resources Management Report 95)*. Tempe: Office of Cultural Resource Management, Department of Anthropology, Arizona State University.
- Olwig, Karen F, and Eva Guløv (editors)
2003 *Children's Places: Cross-cultural Perspectives*. Routledge, New York.
- Parker, Dorothy R.
1996 *Phoenix Indian School: The Second Half-century*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press.
- Sánchez, George I.
1940 *Forgotten People: A Study of New Mexicans*. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque.
- Trennert, Robert
1988 *The Phoenix Indian School: Forced Assimilation in Arizona, 1891-1935*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.