

SUNSET PARK
255 West Alameda Street
Tucson
Pima County
Arizona

HALS AZ-23
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

**HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
SUNSET PARK**

HALS NO. AZ-23

Location: 255 W. Alameda Street, Tucson, Pima County, Arizona
32.222929, -110.975041 (Tucson Old Walled City Marker North West Corner of Sunset Park, Google Earth, WGS84)

Significance: The site where Sunset Park is now located has been continuously inhabited since approximately 450 CE, and is a site of archaeological significance. The artifacts found on this site tell the story of this continual habitation, and provide continuity for the timeline of human activity in the area ranging from Native American use, to Spanish Colonial conquest, to the expansion of the United States into the western frontier. Some of these important sites have already been lost to construction activities related to urban renewal, most notably the construction of City Hall in 1972, but many important discoveries have been made during limited excavations of the area since. There are undoubtedly more pieces of Tucson's long history hidden beneath the surface of the park. The park's primary importance is due to the abundance of archeological resources and its connection to Tucson's cultural history. The park continues to be used for recreation and relaxation by people who work and live nearby.

Description: Sunset Park is a 28,392 square foot site that sits in front of Tucson's city hall, and serves as a buffer between the building and Alameda Street. It is bordered on its northern edge by Alameda Street, on its southern edge by city hall, on its eastern edge by El Presidio Park, and on its western edge by a fenced in parking lot. The property facilitates drainage of the site with a slight northwest slope that diverts rainwater away from city hall and El Presidio Park. Rain water is also intentionally diverted to the park's various trees and shrubs by shallow river rock lined drainage ditches (Figure 1 and Figure 4). The park's vegetation includes a mix of native and nonnative species including mesquite trees, palo verde trees, palm trees, bird of paradise shrubs, and other varieties of trees and shrubs (Figure 2 and Figure 3). The ground that is unoccupied by other features is consumed by patches of grass, gravel pathways, or uncovered natural desert earth (Figure 2 and Figure 5). The park also has all of the common support features that can be found in a public park including: large outdoor trashcans along all of the walking paths, next to all of the benches, and in the bare earth picnic area (Figure 2 and 4); sidewalk and pathway lighting from dome covered metal pole outdoor lights (Figure 1); and low tile mosaic decorated masonry walls that separate different areas of the park and help guide and facilitate movement through the space (Figure 3).

The park is tightly contained within the tall buildings of Tucson's civic center,

limiting views outside the area with the exception of a single vista which allows park goers to see A-Mountain in the distance as they stand next to the volunteer memorial at the park's center and look to the southwest. The park, serving largely as a green buffer between city hall and the street, is filled with gravel walking paths and sidewalks, benches, and historic markers and memorials. The various gravel walking paths range from four to eight feet in width (Figure 1 and Figure 4). They branch off of the main sidewalks leading off to the various shaded benches and memorial markers. The concrete sidewalks range from six to fifteen feet in width and generally run along the park's perimeter (Figure 5). These perimeter sidewalks funnel visitors to city hall onto a single concrete walkway that passes to the east of the volunteer memorial and leads to the stairs up to city hall's front entry. The park's trees are strategically placed to shade the various benches that can be found throughout the park. The park has three different kinds of benches; many of the trails and walking paths end in wooden slat benches that provide shaded sitting areas (Figure 4), there are circular metal mesh style picnic tables in the exposed desert earth picnic area just east of the volunteer memorial (Figure 6), and there is a single red marble memorial bench to Richard Heakin, a gay man killed in Tucson in the 1970s (Figure 7). The historical markers and monuments on the site include: the metal plaque set into a small stone wall by The Daughters of the American Revolution commemorating Tucson's history as a walled presidio located next to the perimeter sidewalk adjacent to Alameda Street on the park's west side (Figure 8), a monument to the life and work of Father Kino which consists of two metal plaques set into a high stone wall located just south of the walled city plaque (Figure 9), and a small segment of the recent memorial to the walled history of Tucson which consists of a sandstone strip laid into the ground that retraces the original presidio wall (Figure 10), and the large volunteer memorial located in the park's center which is a concrete cylinder covered in a tile mosaic that celebrates the work of volunteers in the park's creation (Figure 5).

The park itself, although it contains several historical markers, is not historically significant. The site that it sits on however, is significant for its archeological resources. During archeological excavations conducted on the site several trenches were dug and artifacts were found that suggests that the area has been used by humans for thousands of years. Although it is impossible to say with any certainty what exactly the site was used for before the arrival of the Spanish, the few trenches that were dug did yield Native American artifacts, and could someday reveal some of the secrets of the area's significance to prehistoric peoples. It is known that the park now sits atop a block with a recorded history that goes back to the original founding of Tucson as a Spanish presidio. The first American made map, made in 1862, of the area shows four structures at the western end of the Plaza de las Armas that are now covered by the park and city hall. The 1883 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company map of the area, designated as block 186 by the 1872 George Foreman Survey, gives a detailed record of the site's structures during that time. An overlay of modern structures onto that 1883 map shows that the west end of the park sits on top of several dwellings

(including Chinese immigrant dwellings occupied by railroad workers), a Chinese grocery store, and several outhouses. All of these buried structures can provide valuable insight into Tucson's cultural heritage, and remains of these structures were found beneath the park during limited archeological investigations. Later Sanborn maps, specifically the 1901 map, indicate that the northwestern portion of the park also sits atop the Tucson Natatorium, one of Tucson's first public swimming pools, and a temporary school house that were both erected atop demolished dwellings. It was not until 1909 that the park was initially placed over block 186.

History: The Tucson Valley has a long history of human habitation that can be traced back to the very first humans ever to set foot on North American soil. Remains from mammoth kills and prehistoric stone projectile points left by "Paleoindians" dating back to around 11,000 years ago have been discovered in areas surrounding the City of Tucson.^{1,2} After these early American settlers, came the Hohokam. The best archeological evidence suggests that the Hohokam inhabited the area where the City of Tucson now stands from 450 CE to 1450 CE. Their civilization, however, had vanished before the arrival of the Spanish, and architectural remains were all that recorded history ever saw of them.³ The Spanish found the Tucson area inhabited by the Sobaipuri Pima and Tohono O'odam. These agrarian tribes had harnessed the perennial river systems, primarily the Santa Cruz River, in the otherwise harsh desert environment for the growing of crops.⁴ Because of the agrarian nature of the Hohokam, Pima, and Tohono O'odam, Tucson has a tradition of agriculture that has been present in the valley for over 4,000 years.⁵

With the arrival of the Spanish, the area that is now covered by the City of Tucson grew into a colonial settlement. Silver was discovered in 1736, and the influx of Spanish settlers, both those that stopped in Tucson and those that continued to California, led to the site becoming part of the Presidio line.⁶ The site of the original Tucson Presidio lies, in part, beneath what is now Sunset Park. Information on the Presidio's beginnings is difficult to accurately ascertain as most of the documents housed within were taken by the Mexican military as they withdrew after the Gadsden Purchase.⁷ According to a map drawn up by the Union Army in 1862, the part of the Presidio that is now Sunset Park once formed the western boundary of the La Plaza de las Armas. This small area

¹ Homer Thiel, Michael Faught, and James Bayman, *Beneath the Streets: Prehistoric, Spanish, and American Period Archeology in Downtown Tucson* (Tucson, AZ: Center for Desert Archaeology, 1995).

² "A Brief History of Tucson," July 21, 2014, <https://www.tucsonaz.gov/info/brief-history-tucson>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Jonathan Mabry, "UNESCO Creative Cities Network Application Form: Tucson, Arizona" (The City of Tucson, 2015), https://www.tucsonaz.gov/files/integrated-planning/COG_Application_Tucson-signed.pdf.

⁶ Thiel, Faught, and Bayman, *Beneath the Streets: Prehistoric, Spanish, and American Period Archeology in Downtown Tucson*.

⁷ Ibid.

would later become Tucson City block 186. The evolution of this small block over time has been documented by maps made by the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company. Archeological expeditions in the park have revealed foundations from the old Presidio as well as Native American artifacts still present beneath the surface.⁸

Although several Native American artifacts including pottery shards have been found on the site, it is impossible to determine the exact use of the site prior to the arrival of the Spanish.⁹ Even after their arrival, information is scant. The fortified Presidio was founded by Hugo O'Coner in 1775, but, as previously mentioned, many of the documents were taken by Mexican authorities during their withdrawal in 1856.¹⁰ The earliest known maps of the old Presidio were drawn up by Major D. Fergusson in 1862, and they show that by that time several portions of the old wall had already been removed. Three dwellings were depicted on that map in the location that is now Sunset Park on the westernmost border of the La Plaza de las Armas.¹¹ In 1871, local leaders decided to annex the area. Surveyor George Foreman conducted the official survey, and the site was designated block 186.¹² The next known detailed map of the Sunset Park area was drawn up the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company in 1883. This map shows the layout of block 186 as well as defines the uses of the buildings at the time. The area contained one small office, several homes, and a large open courtyard with a communal well and privy. The entire south side of the block was dedicated to Chinese railroad workers with several small dwellings, a saloon, and a Chinese grocer tucked into the southwest corner. Also included in the 1883 map, was the recently completed Congregational Church.¹³ The area changed dramatically before the next Sanborn Map was drawn up in 1901. The office depicted in the 1883 map was vacant by 1886, and all of the dwellings on the east side had been demolished by 1901. In their place a temporary school house and the Tucson Natatorium, one of Tucson's first public swimming pools which also covered the adjacent courtyard, well, and privy, had been built. The Chinese area at the southern end of the block was left untouched until the entire block was demolished to build Sunset Park between 1904 and 1909.¹⁴

After 1909 the area evolved at a slower pace. There were, however, two major changes that were made on the site after 1909. These were the construction of the city's second city hall building and jail in 1916, and the construction of the current city hall building in 1972. The second city hall building consumed the

⁸ Homer Thiel, "Archaeological Test Excavations in Sunset Park, Tucson, Arizona" (Center for Desert Archaeology, September 1995).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Thiel, Faught, and Bayman, *Beneath the Streets: Prehistoric, Spanish, and American Period Archeology in Downtown Tucson*.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Thiel, "Archaeological Test Excavations in Sunset Park, Tucson, Arizona."

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

east end of the park and the land that was once occupied by the Congregational Church. The church was demolished in 1915 to make way for the new city hall.¹⁵ The 1916 city hall building served until 1972 when it was demolished to make room for the 1972 city hall building that is still in service today. This much larger structure covers the southeastern portion of what was once the park, Ott Street, and the dwellings that once belonged to Chinese immigrants in block 186.¹⁶ Somewhat ironically, it was in this same year that the City of Tucson passed its first ordinances for the protection of historic districts.¹⁷

Today Sunset Park serves the community as a small green space that provides seating and shade near city hall. It also contains three memorial placards to the Old Walled City celebrating the history of the Spanish Presidio put in place by the Daughters of the American Revolution, to the life and work of Father Kino, and to the volunteers that helped build the park as it is seen today.¹⁸ Given the park's long history of habitation, it is understandable that a wealth of archaeological remains would be left beneath the site. During archaeological excavations conducted preceding the construction of additions to the park's landscape to determine potential threats to the cultural remains on the site, two test trenches were excavated and several artifacts were discovered.¹⁹

The trenches were dug in three separate levels, with the artifacts from each being dated, sorted and catalogued. The first excavations of the two trenches were done with the intention of understanding the area's history, bringing to light artifacts including Native American Ceramics, as well as Euro-American, Mexican and Chinese ceramics -- most of these coming from bowls, cups, plates and pictures. Aside from these, glass and metal objects were also common finds as well as buttons made of shell and bone. With the realization of the history hidden underneath Sunset Park, supplemental testing took place on August 31 and September 1, 1995. Four additional trenches were dug to determine the cultural importance of other areas of the park. While these new trenches compare in artifacts, they do not give as much understanding of the underlying walls as seen in trench 1. With these trenches aiding in the recovery of hundreds of archaeological finds, the park has been deemed to have evidence of cultural significance.²⁰

The goal of this testing was to determine whether Sunset Park is eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places based on its subsurface

¹⁵ Homer Thiel, "Archaeological Test Excavations in Sunset Park, Tucson, Arizona" (Center for Desert Archaeology, September 1995).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ "A Brief History of Tucson."

¹⁸ Bill Kirchner, "Tucson Old Walled City Historical Marker," January 12, 2010, <http://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?marker=26399>; Bill Kirchner, "Padre-Eusebio-Francisco-Kino, S.J. Historical Marker," January 12, 2010, <http://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?marker=26394>; Bill Kirchner, "Alameda Street Historical Marker," October 23, 2013, <http://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?marker=83008>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

remains.²¹ Archaeological research indicates that intact cultural resources are present in Sunset Park. Whether these artifacts be solely 18th and 19th century or prehistory has yet to be determined.

Despite the significant archeological and cultural importance of Sunset Park, changes continue to be made. Most of those changes have been on the surface and have not disturbed sensitive historic artifacts, but knowledge of the importance of this site among the general public is nearly nonexistent. There are no historical interpretative waysides at Tucson City Hall, which sits atop part of the old Plaza de las Armas and Block 186.

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Historians:

- Ivory Houk: Student of Heritage Conservation at the University of Arizona
- Jeff Tolin: Student of Sustainable Built Environments at the University of
- August 28, 2017.

²¹ Ibid.



Figure 1. Defining boundaries for park, Alameda St on the left and City Hall on the right. Facing slightly North-East. (Ivory Houk, 2017).



Figure 2. Desert landscaping in park, native trees and shrubs. Facing North-East. (Ivory Houk, 2017).



Figure 3. Arizona Sycamore tree. Facing East.
(Ivory Houk, 2017).



Figure 4. Looking at the fluidity of the park as well as river rock drainage systems. Facing North-East. (Ivory Houk, 2017).



Figure 5. Combination of gravel and concrete walkways passing through the park and Volunteer memorial. Facing North-East. (Ivory Houk, 2017).



Figure 6. View of mesh-style picnic tables in exposed desert landscape. Facing North-East. (Ivory Houk, 2017).



Figure 7. View of red marble memorial bench dedicated to Richard Heakin. Facing North. (Ivory Houk, 2017).



Figure 8. View of Tucson Old Walled City memorial. Facing South. (Ivory Houk, 2017).



Figure 9. View of Father Kino monument. Facing slightly North-East. (Ivory Houk, 2017).

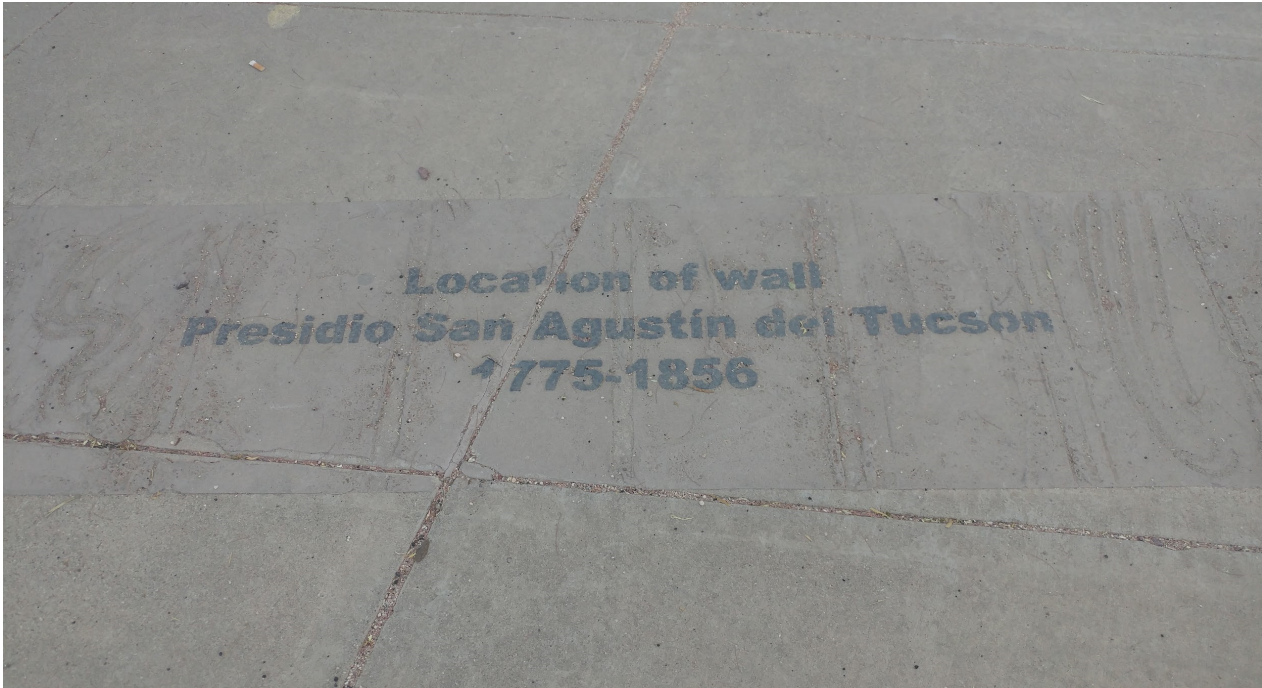


Figure 10. Location of original presidio wall. Facing slightly North-East. (Ivory Houk, 2017).