INTRODUCTION

In 1879, Francisco Solano León was called to testify at a trial by lawyers seeking to understand whether a land grant was valid. He was asked, “Do you know what became of the archives of the Mexican Justice of the Peace of Tucson?” and answered, “They were taken to Imuris, in the District of Magdalena, Sonora, Mexico, and thereafter I do not know what became of them” (United States Court of Private Land Claims, 1879, 4:117–121, Special Collections, University of Arizona, Tucson). This and other losses of military, civil, and church archives of Tucson has hindered modern Tucsonans from understanding many aspects of their community’s rich history. Today, many residents know little of the city’s Spanish mission and presidio past.

Archaeological research, conducted in the last twenty years by Desert Archaeology, Inc., and the nonprofit Archaeology Southwest (formerly the Center for Desert Archaeology), has helped fill in some of the gaps in our knowledge of Tucson’s early history (Thiel 1996, 2004, 2005, 2008a, 2008b; Thiel et al. 1995; Thiel and Mabry 2006). Excavation work has uncovered architectural remains...
along with a number of trash-filled pits and middens that have yielded artifacts and food materials. Documentary research has uncovered new information in archives in Spain, Mexico, California, and Arizona. As a result of this research, the biographies of several hundred Tucson Presidio families have been compiled, the northeast corner of the presidio and the mission gardens have been re-created for a historical parks, and a better understanding of daily life within the presidio has been developed.

THE PIMERÍA ALTA

The Pimería Alta was the northern lands of the Spanish Empire in what is now northern Mexico and the American Southwest (Figure 12.1). The region is mountainous in places, mostly desert, with occasional oases where water can be obtained close to the surface. In the seventeenth century, the region was sparsely occupied by Native Americans living in small settlements called rancherías. Pima or O’odham residents practiced subsistence agriculture while continuing to hunt wild game and collect wild plants (Officer et al. 1996).

Father Eusebio Francisco Kino, a Jesuit priest, was the first European to extensively explore the Pimería Alta (see chapter by Lauren E. Jelinek and Dale S. Brenneman, chapter 10 in this volume). He was tasked with establishing missions and visitas, or smaller satellite churches. Native Americans were expected to settle permanently at the missions, convert to Catholicism, and become productive members of the new society—raising crops, providing labor, and helping protect the missions against other hostile Native Americans (Polzer 1998).

Kino’s endeavors resulted in the establishment of over twenty missions at existing Native American settlements before his death in 1711. The missions were slow to develop: the distance from Mexico City and the lack of rich natural resources resulted in little attention being given by the Spanish government. The Jesuit mission church at San Xavier del Bac was finally completed in the 1750s, only to see the Pima Revolt of 1751 empty the area of Spaniards. When they returned they constructed a presidio fortress at the village of Tubac, situated north of the Mission of Tumacacori and south of Bac. The presence of Spanish soldiers allowed for the return of Catholic clergy to Bac, and afterward the Spaniards had a relatively good relationship with the local O’odham and Pima (Officer 1989).

THE SAN AGUSTÍN MISSION

Father Kino visited the O’odham village of S-cuk Son in the late 1690s. The village name, roughly translates to “at the base of the black,” the black referring to the volcanic mountain immediately west of the village. The bedrock of the mountain forced the Santa Cruz River to the surface, and the residents of the village ran small irrigation ditches to fields of maize, beans, and squash.
Kino brought Old World crops, including wheat and fruit trees, as well as cattle, horses, and sheep, to the villagers (Polzer 1998).

Kino selected the village to be a visita of Bac, to the south. The missionaries also planned on opening a trade school to teach the local O’odham crafts, including tanning leather and pottery making, though these endeavors apparently never panned out. The village was occasionally visited by the Spanish priest, but it was not until 1771 that a church, San Agustín, was constructed there, fulfilling the promise made decades earlier by Kino (Dobyns 1976). Throughout the course of its occupation, the San Agustín Mission had problems maintaining a stable population. Contemporary missions throughout the Pimería Alta and
Alta California faced the same problem, a result of periodic epidemics of smallpox and other European diseases, as well as high child mortality (Jackson 1998). Malaria was also a problem in Tucson (Mabry and Thiel 1995).

THE PRESIDIO SAN AGUSTÍN DEL TUCSON

In August 1775, an Irishman named Hugo O’Conor, a captain in the Spanish military, selected the location of the new Presidio San Agustín del Tucson on a terrace overlooking the Santa Cruz River floodplain, a short distance east of the San Agustín Mission. He had been tasked to examine the physical locations of the line of presidio forts extending from Louisiana westward to California, studying each existing fortress to identify deficiencies in its construction and location. Some forts were selected by him for closure, and new locations for presidios were identified. O’Conor’s mission was to define the northern boundaries of the Spanish Empire in the New World at a time when other colonial powers were expanding their territorial claims. In the Pimería Alta, conflicts with indigenous Native American groups had to be addressed, and the placement of forts was crucial to providing protection for settlements to the south (Santiago 1994).

During O’Conor’s travels, he stopped at the Presidio of Tubac. He found a fortified captain’s house surrounded by other dwellings, storehouses, and stables. O’Conor was skeptical that it was defensible against hostile Native American attacks (Santiago 1994).

In the 1770s, the Spaniards were allied with the peaceable O’odham speakers, who lived in small settlements along the Santa Cruz and San Pedro Rivers in southern Arizona. The Spaniards and O’odham were allied against the Apache, who lived primarily in the mountains to the north and regularly traveled south to raid their neighbors in search of livestock, foodstuffs, goods, and captives (Officer et al. 1996). The Apache were heading south, deeper into Sonora, raiding missions, ranches, and mining communities occupied by the Spanish and their Native allies.

O’Conor decided to move the garrison at Tubac. In 1776, sixty soldiers and their families arrived in Tucson from Tubac and built a wooden palisade. Only a handful of these soldiers had been born in Spain; the rest were second- or third-generation (or more) residents of communities along the northern Spanish frontier. The men enlisted for ten-year intervals, often reenlisting at the end of their service since work as a soldier was the only occupation in the region that came with regular pay. Some of the men rose through the ranks, either from family connections or through demonstrated ability, while others served as foot soldiers, spending their spare time raising crops on the Santa Cruz River floodplain. Surviving records indicate that many of the men participated in dozens of expeditions against the Apache. Some would eventually receive invalid pensions as a result of wounds received during these raids. Most would remain in the
community after retiring from the military, and in the coming years, their sons would in turn enlist in the military (Thiel 2008c).

The basic outline of early Tucson history can be assembled from surviving records. However, these records fail to provide other kinds of information that can be derived from archaeological excavations. In the remainder of this chapter, I examine both documentary and archaeological evidence of the early presidio and mission history of Tucson. What was life like for the soldiers and civilians who lived at the Presidio San Agustín del Tucson? How did the residents of Tucson cope with their isolation and obtain the items that they needed to negotiate day-to-day existence? Research conducted over the last twenty years can begin to answer these and many other questions about daily life in early Tucson.

BUILDING A FORTRESS

O’Conor’s placement of a fortress within the Tucson Basin helped close off the route along the Santa Cruz River used by Apache raiders and protected travelers heading north to the Gila River, while providing an easy base for excursions out into Apache territory. A secondary purpose was to solidify the Spanish claim to the region as British and Russian explorers journeyed up and down the Pacific Coast of California, though this was never tested in the Pimería Alta (Officer 1989:50).

The Tucson Presidio was one of many Spanish settlements in the Pimería Alta. To the south were other presidios, as well as Catholic missions, ranches, mines, and Native American communities. These were scattered sparsely across the landscape, usually along permanent water sources that allowed cultivation of agricultural fields (Officer et al. 1996; see also chapters by Jelinek and Brenneman [10], and Barnet Pavao-Zuckerman [11], this volume). The lack of readily available water sources, as well as the presence of hostile Native Americans, limited the number and size of settlements. At times, conflicts, primarily with the Apache, caused many settlements to be abandoned (Officer 1989; Santiago 1994).

The presidio in Tucson was constructed from locally available materials. Initially, a wooden palisade was constructed, probably of cottonwood and willow trees cut along the Santa Cruz River (Dobyns 1976:60). In May 1782, a large Apache attack nearly succeeded in overwhelming the poorly defended fort. The firing of a cannon by Commander Allande surprised the attacking warriors and apparently ended the battle (McCarty 1976:44). Afterward, ongoing efforts to complete surrounding adobe walls were accelerated, and their construction was completed by the middle of 1783. Three-meter-tall walls enclosed a space measuring about 204 meters across, with large towers on two opposing corners. Archaeological remnants of the adobe foundations indicate that they were fashioned from adobe bricks alternating with layers of puddled adobe that was poured in place to hasten construction (Thiel and Mabry 2006). Soil was mined
from the exterior of the fort, creating a shallow ditch along the exterior base of the walls, helping to increase their elevation and retard water erosion of their bases. Soil-mining pits were also located on the adjacent floodplain (Thiel 2008a). These soil-mining pits were then used for trash disposal and were the source of much of the archaeological materials recovered during the presidio excavations (Thiel 2008b; Thiel and Mabry 2006). Cattail pollen was recovered from the adobes, indicating that water was drawn from the irrigation canals on the floodplain for construction purposes (Thiel et al. 1995).

The interior of the presidio’s walls was lined with dwellings, stables, storehouses, and granaries, with a church centered along the east wall. The commandant’s residence was located near the center of the fort, adjacent to a plaza where soldiers drilled. These structures were also built from adobe bricks, most set directly on the ground surface (Thiel et al. 1995). Pine trees for roof vigas were cut on the Santa Rita Mountains, about sixty-five kilometers to the south. Two large meteorites were also found in the Santa Ritas in the 1820s and were transported back to Tucson where they were used as blacksmith’s anvils (Willey 1987). Cattle hides served as door coverings, and dwellings lacked window glass. Given the small available workforce, it seems likely that at least some of the labor to construct the presidio was conducted by local Native Americans.

**THE PEOPLE OF THE PRESIDIO**

About sixty soldiers and their families were the first residents of the presidio. Spanish officials were very interested in racial classifications, and this was the case early on in the fort’s history. Among the initial inhabitants were twelve Spaniards (of Spanish ancestry), ten coyotes (of Spanish and Native American ancestry), three moriscos (of African and Spanish ancestry), and one mulatto (also of African and Spanish ancestry) (Dobyns 1976:153). Enlistment records indicate continued use of such racial categorization into the 1790s, but afterward race classifications largely disappear from documents generated at the presidio.

Population counts were collected in censuses during the years the presidio was occupied, though these often failed to include local Native Americans. In 1797, there were 295 people present: 101 soldiers, 110 family members, and 84 other civilians (Collins 1970; Dobyns 1972). In 1831 there were 465 residents of the presidio, 193 in civilian households and 272 in military households (McCarty 1981a, 1981b). In 1848, 760 people were counted (Officer 1989:214). An 1851 cholera epidemic killed 122 residents of the community (Officer 1989:387).

After about 1800, few of the newly recruited soldiers came from outside Tucson. Instead, the sons of presidio soldiers were enlisting. No women were arriving from outside the community. As a result, only a handful of potential spouses were available for each man or woman in Tucson. Most residents were
of mixed-race ancestry, and people were compelled to not take into account a person’s racial background when looking for a husband or wife within the small community (Thiel 2008c). An identical, concurrent pattern of upward movement and abandonment of the caste system also took place in California (Haley and Wilcoxon 2005; Voss 2005). Despite the lack of eligible partners, one custom did remain—residents did not marry local Native Americans.

NATIVE AMERICAN INTERACTIONS

Tucson has been the home of Native Americans for over 4,000 years. The Santa Cruz River floodplain was the location of irrigation agriculture for the last 3,200 years (Thiel and Mabry 2006). When Father Kino visited the Native American village of S-cuk Son, he was impressed by the potential of its agricultural fields. Hugo O’Conor probably viewed this Native American community as a source of potential labor and its agricultural lands as a source of food.

The San Agustín Mission village was primarily occupied by local O’odham. In 1762, the Sobaipuri Pima moved from their villages along the San Pedro River to the mission to escape Apache attacks (Officer 1989:40). The mission population fluctuated due to losses from disease and emigration to other communities. An 1801 census lists 190 Papago, 25 Pima, and 6 Gileño residents living at the mission (University of Arizona Main Library, Parish Archives of Sonora and Sinaloa, Mexico, Microfilm 811, reel 3). Crops and livestock raised by the mission community were sold to the presidio at a reduced cost (McCarty 1997). Smashed cattle bones found at San Agustín indicate tallow production was taking place, the product likely sold to the military or to miners working to the south, useful for greasing wooden wagon axles and the pulleys used to haul ore from mine shafts (Pavao-Zuckerman 2011, and chapter 11 in this volume).

The San Agustín Mission residents and their relatives at Bac often teamed up with the Spaniards in raids against their traditional enemy, the Apache. The Apache frequently attacked O’odham villages in search of food, livestock, goods, and captives. After the arrival of the Spaniards, they frequently attacked the presidio and its nearby fields, killing residents and running off livestock. This antagonistic relationship intensified after the construction of the new presidios at Terrenate and Tucson, and the Spaniards often sent out parties to hunt down and kill Apache in their homes in the mountains north and east of Tucson (Officer 1989).

In 1792, the Spanish government agreed to provide a group of Apache with food, clothing, and tools in exchange for a guarantee that they would live peacefully at the presidio. The manso Apache settled northwest of the fort and maintained a fragile truce with the local O’odham (Dobyns 1976:98; McCarty 1976:61–63). The Manso Apache served as a conduit of information, warning the fort when they heard that their mountain relatives were planning raids (Officer 1989; McCarty 1997).
Presidio residents traded extensively with the local O’odham and the Manso Apaches. Besides labor, the Native Americans offered firewood, hay, wild game, and gathered foodstuffs including cactus fruit, saguaro syrup, and mesquite flour. Residents of the fort could also obtain these items through their own efforts, though it made more sense to rely on the Native Americans. When recovered from archaeological deposits, the exact origins of these items are impossible to determine; a plausible explanation, however, is that they were derived through exchange with Native Americans.

In contrast, it is easy to recognize local pottery traded by Native Americans to the fort residents. The Sobaipuri Pima manufactured vessels with a distinctive folded rim. Local O’odham began to add manure to pottery by the 1820s, resulting in a black core that allowed water to slowly seep through the vessel, evaporating on the exterior and cooling the vessel contents (Fontana et al. 1962). These characteristics make remains of these products relatively easy to identify in the archaeological record. One of the problems faced by the people of Tucson was the difficulty and cost of importing metal cookware. Iron or brass cooking pots were heavy; expensive; and, when broken, hard to replace. There is no evidence for the production of ceramic vessels by the Spaniards living in the presidio. As a result, O’odham potters at San Xavier del Bac produced and traded to the Spaniards bean pots, which were used for cooking stews and soups, and large bowls, which were used for serving (Figure 12.2). Native Americans also began creating two new vessel forms based upon Spanish prototypes. Flat ceramic comales were used as replacements for iron tortilla griddles, and ceramic mugs replaced copper chocolatero pots (Heidke 2006). Both were important to Tucson residents, with wheat tortillas and hot, frothy chocolate beverages representing high-status, culturally significant foodstuffs for the soldiers and civilians living within the fortress walls. Chocolate was sent up to the Tucson Presidio in hard blocks. It was a luxurious necessity, a comfort food in difficult times often fed to the sick and one that melted in Tucson’s fierce summer heat (Cabezon et al. 2009).

In exchange for these items, the presidio residents offered fabric, brass buttons and buckles, beads, religious medallions, manufactured clothing, blankets, weapons, ammunition, and tools to their Native American allies. Examples of some of these trade goods have been found at the contemporaneous O’odham sites of Guevavi Mission, the San Xavier Mission, and the San Agustín Mission (Robinson 1963; Seymour 2012; Wasley 1956).

In 1795, the Tucson Presidio commander, José de Zúñiga, led an expedition to New Mexico, stopping at the Zuni villages about 300 miles to the north (Officer 1989:68). It seems likely that the soldiers traded items to the Zuni in exchange for a few black-on-white or polychrome ceramic vessels, fragments of which have been found in the presidio (Figure 12.3). The vessels would have contrasted sharply with the red ware and plain ware vessels produced in the Tucson area. A
small number of Puebloan ceramics from Arizona and New Mexico have been found at most of the Spanish sites in southern Arizona, and are also found at some late prehistoric- and historical-period Native American sites (Ferg 2004). In addition, a limited amount of trade appears to have taken place between the Native American communities; however, the scale and scope of this exchange are not currently well understood (see chapter by Jelinek and Brenneman [chapter 10 in this volume]).

**PRESIDIO MATERIAL CULTURE**

Where did residents get the other items they needed for day-to-day living? The residents of the presidio manufactured only a few items in Tucson. For example, an 1804 report lists only serge fabric and wool blankets produced locally (McCarty 1976:85). The nearest stores where goods could be obtained were in Arizpe. Materials and goods purchased in Arizpe would have been carried north about 230 kilometers by freight wagons and pack trains to the presidio company store and the privately run store at the presidio. An 1804 report explicitly states that no goods were received from San Blas, which supplied the majority of goods obtained by presidios and missions in California (McCarty 1976:85; Perissinotto 1998:18). Supplies were also ordered annually from Mexico City and

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**Figure 12.2.** A Piman bean pot found in a trash-filled pit inside the Tucson Presidio (photograph by Homer Thiel).
were brought north by agents to Arizpe. Soldiers were expected to purchase their own uniform, weapons, and horses, as well as whatever household goods they could afford (Sugnet 1994:21).

Soldiers traveled to Arizpe monthly to collect the fort’s payroll and bring back supplies (Thiel 2005). Few records survive to tell what items were brought back to Tucson. Wax (probably for candles), soap, and chocolate were available at the company store (McCarty 1976:89–90). The Gach store records list a few items sent to Tucson, chief among these was chocolate (Sugnet 1994).

The most common manufactured Spanish goods recovered at the presidio are fragments of colorful majolica dishes made in Mexico (Figure 12.4). Bowls and plates were apparently preferred, with only a few pieces of cups identified. The dishes found in early archaeological contexts are mostly in blue-on-white patterns, some with images of birds in the center of the vessel. These were probably designed to resemble Chinese porcelain or Dutch Delftware vessels. After about 1800, polychrome vessels, with elaborate green and yellow floral sprays or multicolored dots on a light blue background, became popular (Lister and Lister 1982).

Why carry these fragile dishes hundreds of miles to the north from pottery factories to the isolated frontier fortress? Analyses of records for majolica imported into Alta California suggests these were relatively inexpensive and were likely not high-status goods (Voss 2012). For the women of the Tucson Presidio, the symbolism of these vessels was likely a factor. It is easy to imagine that the 100 or so adult women living in Tucson would have wanted to serve meals from the same types of dishes that their mothers and grandmothers had used back in communities to the south in Sonora and further into Mexico. Dining from majolica dishes was something that respectable families did. Majolica is not common at eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Native American sites, with only a

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**FIGURE 12.3.** Northern Puebloan ceramic sherds found in the Tucson Presidio (photograph by Robert Ciaccio).
handful of fragments recovered from the nearby contemporaneous San Agustín Mission (Thiel 2006). At the San Francisco Presidio, uniformity in food preparation and service also took place, both to minimize cultural differences among the residents and to set themselves apart from local Native Americans (Voss 2005), and a similar situation may have existed at the Tucson Presidio.

Other items originating from Mexico that are known to have been brought to Tucson included sturdy glazed cooking bowls, horse gear, and some goods that have left no physical traces, including cloth and blocks of chocolate. Collections at the Arizona Historical Society and the Arizona State Museum in Tucson have numerous examples of bridles, stirrups, and spurs found by ranchers out in the deserts throughout southern Arizona (Thiel 2006). Each presidio soldier was expected to have several horses and a pack mule, and horse gear was likely occasionally lost during expeditions or while managing the presidio’s large herds of cattle, horses, and sheep.

Some goods were manufactured in Europe and brought on ships to Mexico then carried north. These included weapons (muskets, pistols, lances, cannons, and ammunition), exotic food stuffs (olive oil, wine, and spices), cloth, buttons, buckles, books, religious paraphernalia, beads, and fine-toothed bone combs (Di Peso 1953).

Clothing-related artifacts found at the presidio include a few brass buttons, some clothing buckles, and beads. One account described how the poorest Sonoran residents wanted to dress above their class (Pfefferkorn 1949:287–88).

**Figure 12.4.** Brightly colored Mexican majolica vessels were used by women at the Tucson Presidio to serve meals (photograph by Homer Thiel).
Presidio-era documents indicate that each soldier was required to purchase a complete uniform each year and that most owned only a single set of clothes. Members of the Mormon Battalion, who marched to the community in 1846, reported that they traded thread, cloth, and buttons to eager Tucson residents for food (Officer 1989). One might expect to find some of these clothing items in burials in the presidio cemetery. This cemetery is located on the east side of the fort around and beneath the presidio chapel and was in use from roughly 1776 to the 1850s. Burials from the cemetery were excavated in 1969 and 1970 by the Arizona State Museum and in 1991 by Desert Archaeology, Inc. (Thiel et al. 1995). Most interments were wrapped in shrouds, as seen by pins or brass staining, and only a handful of buttons were recovered. It is likely that clothing was so valuable that it was passed down to family members rather than buried with the deceased. Pieces of copper wire were found near the heads of two children in the cemetery, and excavations at the nearby National Cemetery, used from the late 1850s to 1875, revealed that many children were buried with wreaths made from artificial flowers attached to a copper frame. This represents the Catholic tradition of Los Angelitos (“the little angels”), emphasizing the purity and innocence of children, who went directly to heaven at death, bypassing purgatory (Heilen et al. 2010; Thiel et al. 1995:111, 115).

Religious artifacts are occasionally found at Spanish-era sites in southern Arizona. A religious medallion and forty-four small glass beads were found in a soil-mining pit next to the Tucson Presidio. The medallion bore the embossed inscription “Corazon de Jesus y de Maria” (the “Heart of Jesus and Mary”) and was worn by followers of Saint Juan Eudes (Thiel 2008b:65–66) Most of these religious artifacts were likely made in Europe. In contrast, the carved statues of saints often found in the missions in southern Arizona were likely constructed in artisan’s studios in Mexico.

Although presidio soldiers carried weapons as part of their daily routines, and weapons are frequently mentioned in contemporary documents, only a trigger guard and a ramrod holder have been found in the Spanish-period deposits excavated within the Tucson Presidio (Brinckerhoff and Chamberlain 1972; Thiel 2006). In contrast, during the 1950s excavations at the contemporary Terrenate Presidio, located to the east on the San Pedro River, numerous gun parts were found that were left behind in 1781 when the fort was abandoned due to incessant Apache raids (Di Peso 1956). Gunstock brass decorations that would have adorned the wooden stocks of muskets were found in several rooms. In the early 2000s, Archaeology Southwest developed a public outreach and education program called the Coronado Project. As part of this project, they held a series of events, called “Coronado Roadshows” (Thiel 2006). At these events, Archaeology Southwest staff invited residents of Arizona and New Mexico to bring in Spanish-era artifacts in for identification and discussion (Thiel 2006).
At one of these events, a man from New Mexico brought in a Spanish escopeta that had been found in a crack in a cliff face in the 1940s (Figure 12.6). The musket was perfectly preserved, with the leather wrapping of the gunflint still in place, and elaborate brass appliqués attached to the stock. It is likely that the soldiers at Tucson had similar weapons and that the brass decorations found at the Terrenate Presidio would have adorned firearms used at that fort in a manner very similar to the weapon shown in Figure 12.5.

Spain cut off trade relations with Mexico after that nation achieved independence in 1821. England then became an ally of Mexico and a new source for trade goods. It had been suspected that soldiers at Tucson used British-made
Brown Bess muskets, but evidence was lacking until the excavation in 1999 of the Francisco Solano León farmstead, located a few hundred meters to the northwest of the presidio. León served in the Mexican military in the 1840s and 1850s, and an English-made Brown Bess trigger guard was found in a soil-mining pit next to his home (Thiel 2005).

Gun flints used in flintlock muskets and pistols had traditionally been manufactured in France. At times, these were difficult to obtain or perhaps too expensive to purchase. Enterprising soldiers or civilians in Tucson made their own from locally available chert. Those flints that were worn out were then reused as strike-a-lights (Sliva et al. 2008).

The overall lack of metal artifacts in Presidio-era features and deposits suggests that recycling of iron and brass items was important. Other recycling was discovered when excavations inside the Presidio blacksmith shop, located on the west side of the fort just south of the Main Gate, led to the discovery of four pieces of prehistoric groundstone on the shop floor. The presidio is built atop a prehistoric site dating to the Early Agricultural and Hohokam Pre-Classic Periods (ca. 400 BC to AD 1150). When examined under a microscope, traces of copper were found pounded into the surface of the groundstones. The blacksmith was using the prehistoric tools, working on the surface of his

**FIGURE 12.6.** Brass gunstock appliqués on an escopeta found in New Mexico. Photograph by Homer Thiel.
Life in Tucson, on the Northern Frontier of the Pimería Alta

A meteorite anvil, to turn scrap metal into useful items for the presidio residents (Heidke et al. 2004).

After 1821, a small number of transfer-printed ceramics began to arrive in the community from England (Thiel 2005). Decorated with romanticized scenes of faraway places—including cathedrals, bridges, forests, and people—they were basically the only source of information about what the outside world looked like. There were few books in the community, and probably the only illustrated ones were religious texts and songbooks housed at the Catholic churches in the presidio, at the Mission of San Agustín, or at the San Xavier Mission. These were likely largely unseen by the general public. Paintings and statues held in churches were at least visible, but provided little information about contemporary fashions or the outside world. Clues about the use of such ceramics can be gleaned from the excavations of the León family farmstead (Thiel 2005). Excavation of the home yielded brightly colored transfer-print dishes. One can imagine Ramona Elias de León, whose husband, Francisco Solano León, served at the presidio in the 1840s and 1850s, serving her guests hot chocolate in her decorated cups from England, and family friends and presidio personnel eagerly examining the clothing styles and architecture depicted on the vessels.

The farthest trade items brought into the Tucson Presidio were fragile Chinese porcelain cups, carried by vessels from China to Manila and from Manila to Acapulco on the western coast of Mexico, and then carried north on pack trains to the presidio (Robinson and Barnes 1976:161). Only a few pieces of the delicate porcelain have been found in Tucson, suggesting it was a rare luxury item, perhaps used by the better-paid military officers (Barnes 1983).

CONCLUSIONS

Life in the Tucson Presidio was harsh and unpredictable. The military and civilian residents of the presidio had to learn to adapt to the challenges of the Sonoran Desert, the isolation due to their position on the northern frontier, and frequent conflicts with the Apache that created problems with the movement of goods (see Pavao-Zuckerman, chapter 11 in this volume). In response, residents appear to have followed a conservative and frugal approach to life. The material culture and food remains that are found at the presidio indicate practicality, the retention of customs in a new community, and the opportunities presented by a close relationship between the presidio soldiers and civilians and local Native American groups.

When possible, local resources were exploited, especially for building materials and foods, bulky items that would have been impractical to move long distances. The presidio residents offered manufactured goods to O’odham and Apache in exchange for firewood, fodder, foods, ceramic vessels, and information. Money paid by the Spanish or Mexican government to the fort or earned by presidio soldiers was used to purchase necessities from distant shops, things
such as arms, ammunition, and clothing, along with a few luxury items such as chocolate and spices. Majolica dishes, which today might seem to be a luxury, were likely viewed as a necessity by presidio housewives, needed to express family roots deeper into New Spain and Mexico. The distance to stores, the dangers and difficulties inherent in transporting goods, and their high cost led to a frugal existence, one where recycling and reuse was an everyday activity. For eighty-one years, residents of the Presidio San Agustín del Tucson endured the harsh conditions of the Sonoran Desert, and while many left for Mexico after the arrival of Americans in 1856, many also stayed and continued on within the community.

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