



# **Eighth Street Multi-Use Path and Streetscape Project**

## **Archaeological Investigation**

Executive Summary  
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## The Eighth Street Multi-Use Path and Streetscape Project archaeological investigation documented over 1,200 years of human history in a small slice of Tempe.

That history began when ancestral O’odham built a canal to provide irrigation water to fields north and south of the project. A village segment grew up between that canal and the Salt River terrace edge, protected from floods and conveniently located to tend nearby agricultural fields. The Salt River terrace, the canal, and the village constituted a persistent place on the landscape that influences how people live to this day.

The City of Tempe (COT), in conjunction with the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) and Federal Highways Administration (FHWA), is planning to construct a multi-use path (MUP) and streetscape improvement project along Eighth Street between Rural Road and McClintock Drive.

The COT Eighth Street MUP and Streetscape Project is partially funded through federal grants. As such, the project must comply with:

- federal laws that protect cultural resources;
- Arizona laws that protect cultural resources and ancestral (human) remains on state lands; and
- The COT’s Historic Preservation Ordinance (Chapter 14A).

This constellation of local, state, and federal laws protects sensitive cultural resources and ancestral remains and provides a means to address adverse effects to those resources when they cannot be avoided by a project like the proposed 8th Street MUP. A series of four cultural resource studies were conducted between 2017 and 2019 that set the stage for subsequent archaeological excavations along Eighth Street.

Archaeological excavations took place within the right-of-way (ROW) of the former Maricopa & Phoenix & Salt River Valley Railroad during the summer of 2018 and again in the summer and fall of 2020 to address potential adverse effects

to historic properties that the proposed trail intersects. Besides the Maricopa & Phoenix & Salt River Valley Railroad, the historic properties include Eighth Street (formerly US Route 80), the Tempe-Hayden Canal System, and the Hohokam village site known as AZ U:9:165(ASM) (aka, La Plaza).

The most substantial and sensitive archaeological



manifestation is a village representing more than six centuries of Native American life between at least AD 850 and 1450. It includes the remains of two pithouses, two cemeteries, a canal, and trash disposal areas. These discoveries provide important details about the village, which was nestled between a terrace edge of the Salt River to the north, a main irrigation canal to the south, and agricultural fields beyond.

The investigation found evidence that village residents farmed maize, cotton, and squash; lived in comfortable homes with plaster floors; and enjoyed the benefits of trade in local, edible food products that could be stored, such as roasted agave hearts, as well as pottery from as far away as Black Mesa in northeastern Arizona. Excavations also revealed the hard work the village residents put into maintaining a turnout canal that irrigated fields to the north with Salt River water delivered through 3.5 miles of main stem canal.

Archaeologists found additional cultural resources, created during to the later life of the village, including another pit house, a cemetery, trash disposal areas, and an agricultural field dating to the late twelfth or early thirteenth century. This later incarnation of the site demonstrates how resilient the village was, having persisted for five centuries at that point. At that time, village residents were still irrigating their fields with water from the Salt River. An investigation of one of these agricultural fields within the project area indicated that inhabitants grew maize and irrigated their crop in the late spring.



The archaeological investigation also uncovered the remains of an exceptionally rare adobe multi-story building dating to the fourteenth century. Only six other examples of this type of building have been identified in the Phoenix Basin, most famously the multi-story buildings preserved at Casa Grande National Monument in Coolidge.

The building discovered along Eighth Street was divided into at least seven interior spaces on its ground floor and may have had at least two additional floors above that. It was simultaneously a residence for an important extended family in the village, a gathering place for community leaders, and a location for community religious ceremonies. Representatives of the direct, lineal descendants of the village residents, the O’odham, have determined that this building was a va’aki, or ceremonial house.



An investigation of the building determined that its occupants enjoyed the bounty of the desert, including saguaro fruit, cholla buds, agave, prickly pear, mesquite pods, and maize. They also used cotton textiles and likely had floor mats made from common reeds and cattails. A unique room within the building contained a cobbled floor covered in adobe plaster. That plaster preserved hundreds of foot impressions left by its builders, which included both adults and children.

Village occupants stopped using the large adobe building sometime in the early fifteenth century, but likely continued farming in the area after AD 1450. The O’odham peoples’ oral history recalls that their ancestors living on the Salt River moved, temporarily, to the Gila River during this period, only to return again in the nineteenth century to reestablish villages that persist to this day on the lands of the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community.

The later nineteenth century also witnessed the establishment of the Tempe-Hayden Irrigation System in the area. A portion known as the Kirkland-McKinney Ditch intersects the Eighth Street project location. Unable to surpass the engineering of the ancestral O’odham, the irrigation ditch followed nearly the same route as the older Native American canal that preceded it. Archaeological excavations along Eighth Street documented three field turnout ditches associated with the Kirkland-McKinney Ditch. These pre-1895 construction features delivered water north to fields within Manuela Sotelo’s homestead, located north of Eighth Street. One of those ditches is noteworthy because it follows nearly the same route as the Native American field turnout canal that was used centuries before. Until it was pipelined around 2005, this was also one of Tempe’s last unlined and open field turnout ditches.

Similar to its Native American predecessor, in the nineteenth century, the Mexican American community along this portion of the Kirkland-McKinney Ditch was situated between irrigation infrastructure to the south and the Salt River terrace edge to the north. The Tempe-Mesa Highway, later the Bankhead Highway, US 80, and ultimately Eighth Street, linked the growing communities of Tempe and Mesa.



In August 1895, construction crews employed by the Phoenix, Tempe & Mesa Railway built a railroad through the already crowded landscape. The construction of the railroad partially destroyed and then buried the Native American archaeological record within the project area. Paradoxically, the railroad grade also protected what remained of the archaeological record that was removed elsewhere by urbanization in downtown Tempe, offering us a glimpse of the city's centuries-old history.

The completed railroad operated as the Maricopa & Phoenix & Salt River Valley Railroad from December 9, 1895, to January 10, 1908. After this, it passed through the hands of several other railroads before the Union Pacific quit-claimed the property to the City of Tempe in 2003.

Archaeological investigations of the railroad within the project area found that it was installed after 1924 by the Arizona & Eastern Railroad, using materials recycled from another track. This event probably had something to do with the expansion of the nearby creamery (now Four Peaks Brewery) beginning in 1927.

Euro-Americans revitalized the same village segment and irrigation canals that Native Americans used several centuries earlier. These areas came to be known as the Sotelo Addition and La Cremaria, positioned between the Kirkland-McKinney Ditch and the Salt River terrace edge.

It was only after 1960 that urbanization changed how people lived and worked in this part of Tempe, with the advent of a regular road grid set on cardinal directions. The grid partitioned a landscape filled with neighborhoods and businesses but decidedly lacking in agricultural fields.

However, even that profound change has not erased the influence of Tempe's Native American past that is coded in the path of a railroad, which followed a road, that ran past a village, that grew up along a canal, and that followed a river terrace edge.

The City of Tempe is working with its consultants to finalize the final archaeological data recovery report this year. It is also pursuing changes to the MUP design to incorporate interpretive/educational elements that celebrate the long history of which the City of Tempe is a steward. The federal funds for the project have been restored, and the project is financed for construction in fiscal year 2024. The City is currently in the process of hiring a design consultant to complete the MUP design.

