

Mixing Sacred and Profane: Hispanic-American Hybrid Towns in the 19th Century American Southwest



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Do what he will, he [the profane man] is an inheritor. He cannot utterly abolish his past, since he himself is a product of his past. He forms himself by a series of denials and refusals, but he continues to be haunted by the realities that he has refused and denied. To acquire a world of his own, he has desacralized the world in which his ancestors lived; but to do so he has been obliged to adopt an earlier type of behavior, and that behavior is still emotionally present in him, in one form or another, ready to be reactualized in his deepest being.

Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, p. 204.

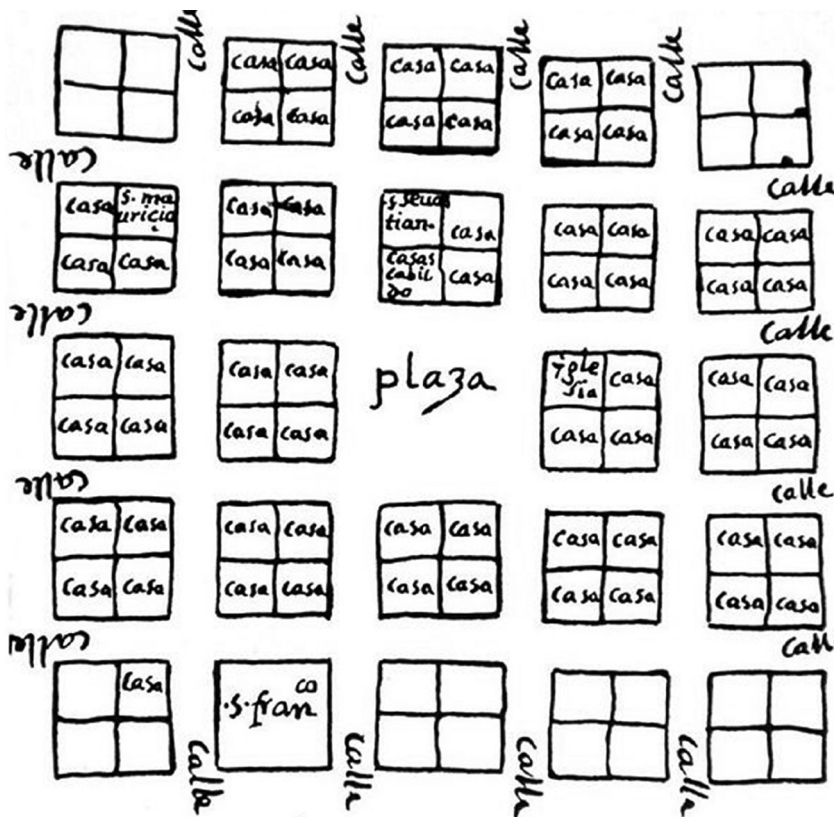
The American southwest¹ encompasses a landscape defined by environmental, social, economic, cultural, and political fluidity. Culturally, the area is defined by overlapping histories of three cultural groups: Native, Hispanic, and American,² each representing continuous, but distinct, periods of occupation dating from 2500 BCE. With the exception of a few densely-populated sites,³ what the Spanish encountered upon their arrival to the region in the 17th Century were dispersed agrarian settlements alongside which they implemented one or more of the established settlement typologies of the Spanish colonial enterprise: mission, presidio, and pueblo.⁴

Due to the distant relationship between the region and Mexico City, the already weak centralized administrative control was exacerbated after Mexico declared independence from Spain in 1821 when centralized financial support declined for colonial settlements in the American southwest. This power vacuum coincided with the arrival of the Americans to the region in mid-19th Century whose settlement policies contrasted sharply with the established Hispanic model. By the beginning of the 20th century, Hispanic towns in the American southwest such as Albuquerque New Mexico (1706), Los Angeles California (1781), and Tucson Arizona (1775), had been transformed into a hybrid expression of Hispanic and American town planning principles creating an urban identity distinct to the region. This paper summarizes both Hispanic and American town planning models and presents the case of Tucson Arizona as an exemplar of the morphological transformation consistent with hybrid towns in the American Southwest.

Hispanic Town Planning Model

The origins of both Hispanic and American town planning models are based on the grid plan as a manifestation of a social paradigm of rational order. Throughout history, and particularly in campaigns of colonization, the use of the grid plan was used as a means of exerting control from great distances and creating a recognizable place in the settlement of foreign lands. (Reps, 10)

During the Spanish colonization of Hispano-America,⁵ the Spanish monarchy created legislation, ultimately known as the Laws of the Indies, to control the colonization campaign, including the establishment of new towns based on a consistent grid plan pattern.⁶ The Laws defined the major urban features of the existing Hispanic town as the central plaza with surrounding arcaded public buildings, placement of the principal church and an urban grid of streets defined by private dwellings radiating from the plaza. Of these features, the plaza is the key characteristic of Hispanic urban and architectural expression and was the center for secular, religious, political, social, and other ceremonial activities. It was not merely the point of convergence of main streets, but also the point at which civic identity was expressed. (Crouch, Garr, and Mudigo, 36)



“Primer Plano de Santiago de León de Caracas, 1578”. Detail illustrating a typical Hispanic Laws of the Indies model town plan. Courtesy of Biblioteca Nacional de Venezuela, G5284.C37.G45.

Open space of various sizes and scales, from intimate residential courtyards to large urban plazas, has been used by various cultures as the organizing element in the place-making of a city and defines the centrality of individual and community, respectively. This was fully manifested in Islamic towns, including those of the Iberian Peninsula 800 years prior to Spain's colonization of Hispano-America. The Islamic hierarchy of centrality begins with the Ka'aba in Mecca, centered in its open space, defining a vertical axis representing God in heaven. It is the symbolic center of the Islamic faith whose concept of centrality is continually repeated through every scale of the built environment from community mosque open spaces

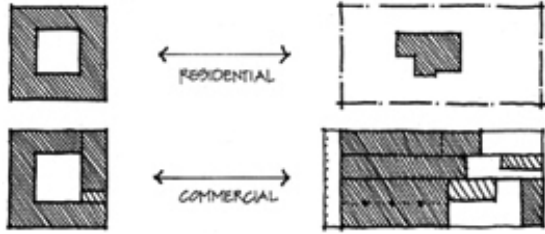
to the dwelling courtyard as the center of the everyday life of the individual. Open space at each scale represents the center of the symbolic world, and is a place of special potency, containing its own center, usually a fountain, well, or small edifice that marks the vertical axis to heaven. The use of open space within Islamic cities is understood as a formal geometry whose symbolic meaning represents centrality in a social / religious / cultural context within concentric layers of individual-to-community identity. In the context of Hispanic town planning, open space is used similarly as a cultural unifying element of new town establishment to define centrality at both the residential (courtyard) and urban (plaza) scales. (Jeffery, 313-315)

American Town Planning Model

The planning and settlement of American towns was guided by the 1785 Land Ordinance that laid a Cartesian grid across thousands of miles of land, known and unknown. The Ordinance defined a grid based on mile-square townships, set aside certain sections of each township for the U.S. federal government and in support of public schools, and left the majority of land for sale to private citizens. In its application, this American town planning model regularized and ordered a vast portion of territory and provided the U.S. federal government an efficient mechanism to sell and settle land that followed the American westward expansion in the 18th the 19th centuries. (Reps, 3)

While the American use of the orthogonal grid is a feature shared with the Hispanic Laws of the Indies towns, the cultural meaning invested in that form is completely different. The Hispanic town prescribes the *in situ* act of finding a place in the landscape and establishing it as the center and starting point. The American town establishment is a process of subdivision of a larger, delineated, abstract grid, with only secondary reference to the local landscape. The American town planning model defined not only a physical ordering of the natural landscape, but promoted an economically speculative

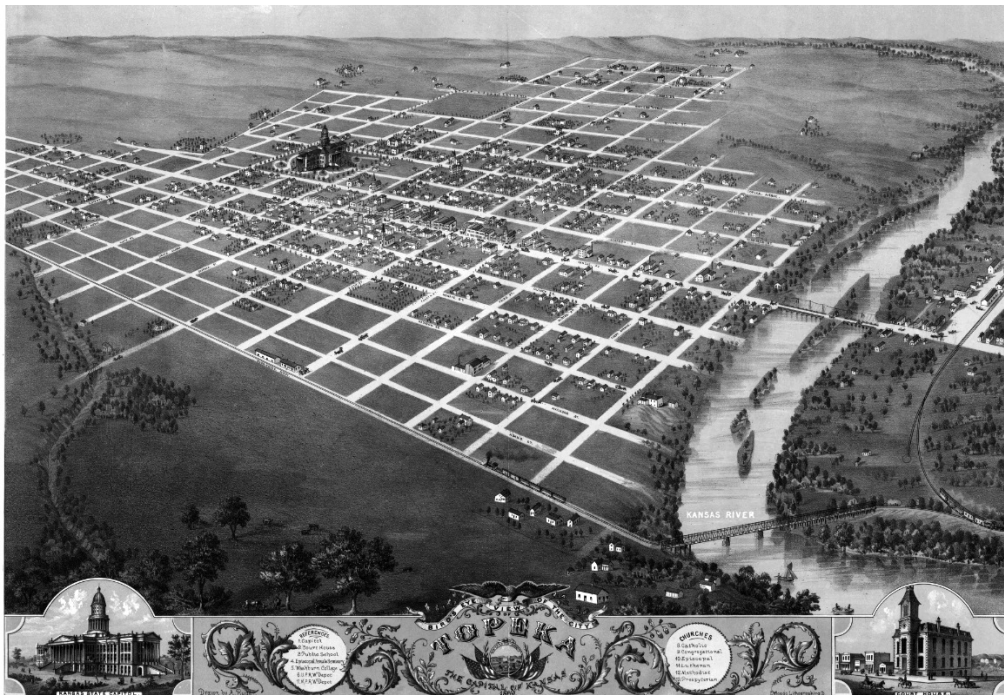
value system that characterized the establishment and growth of the American west. (Reps, 11)



Comparison between the Hispanic (left) and American models of building and urban block layouts. From Veregge, p.434, courtesy The Southwest Center, University of Arizona.

Morphologically, the distinction between Hispanic and American models is best viewed using a ground-figure paradigm

of mass and void relationships. The Hispanic model is characterized by attached building forms directly abutting the street, defining the perimeter of an urban block and continuous street facades.⁷ This accommodated cellular growth toward a unified enclosing form around a shared open space –a courtyard– with an implied vertical axis. The American model of a residential block is characterized by buildings as discrete objects placed in the center of individually demarcated properties as part of a subdivided horizontal grid. Unlike the morphological uniformity of the Hispanic model, the American model is characterized by individuality of the object on the urban landscape, often reinforced by the stylistic distinction of individual buildings.



“Topeka Kansas, 1869”. Illustrating the American Land Ordinance model town plan. Courtesy of Academia Maps.

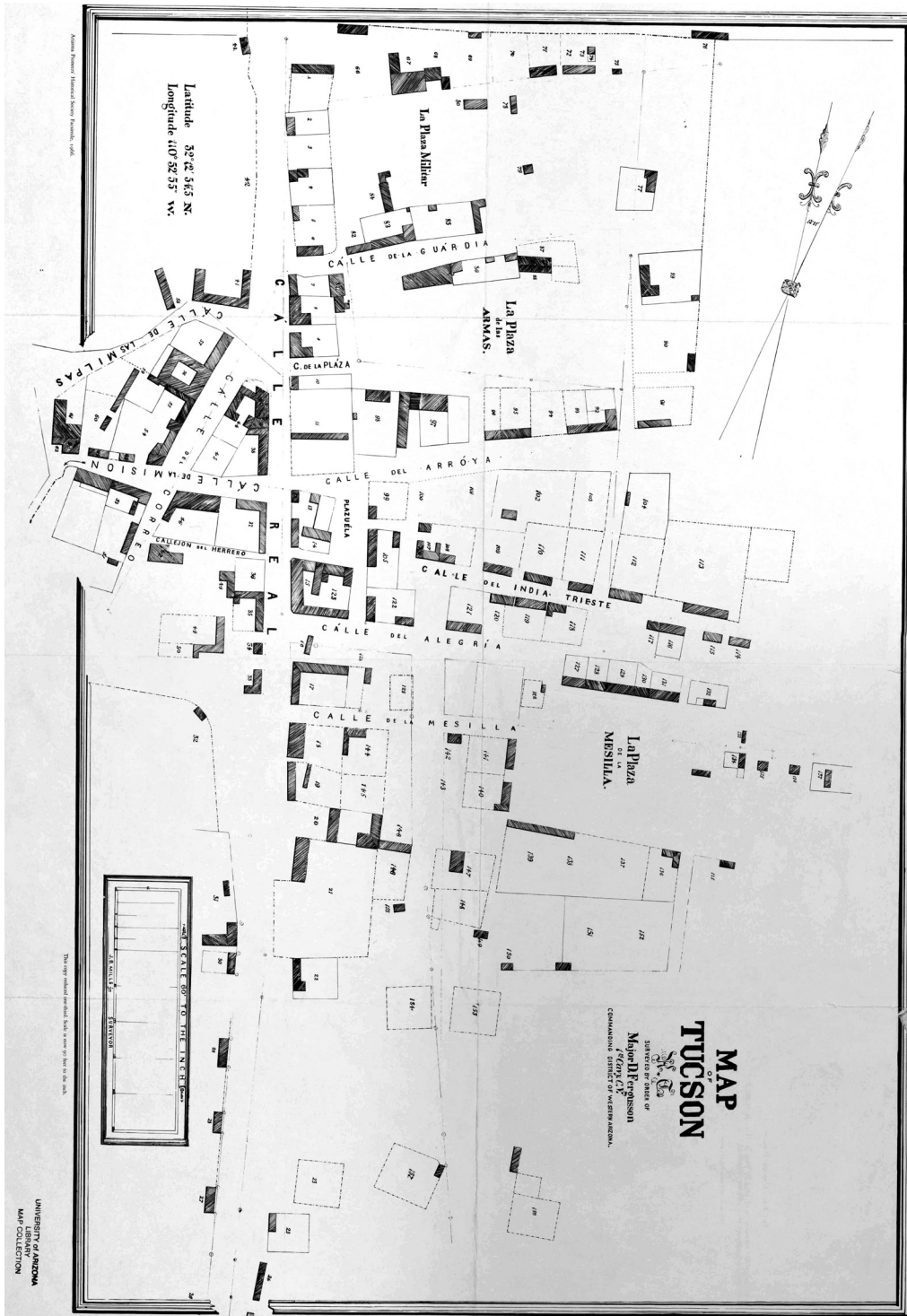
The American Southwest

During the second half of the 19th Century, the American southwest became a fluid landscape of social and cultural adaptation. The American occupation of what is now the American southwest began with explorers in the 1840s, followed by the end of the Mexican-American War (Guerra de Estados Unidos a Mexico) in 1848, and was completed with the Gadsden Purchase (Venta de La Mesilla) in 1853 when a combined one-quarter of Mexican Republic was ceded to in war or purchased by the U.S. government.

Existing towns in this region were incrementally transformed reflecting the intersection between the previous Hispanic community-based cultural value system and center-generated morphology of the Laws of the Indies and the economically speculative value system of the expanding American occupation and linear quality of the Land Ordinance town planning model. The two planning models can be understood to define the end points of a "range of intention" of a theoretical continuum on which the actual architectural expression can occur at any point depending on local or individual circumstances such as distance from centralized authority, available resources, cultural variables, and political motives (Veregge, 430). The transformations that occurred between the Hispanic and American architectural expressions were not immediate and resulted in the creation of many hybrid building and urban forms.

Tucson Arizona: The Evolution of a Hybrid Town

Tucson's Hispanic origins are that of a late-18th century presidio town.⁸ However, when the urban growth moved out of the presidial boundaries in the 19th Century, the Laws of the Indies town planning principles were applied in the definition of the morphological vocabulary of civil buildings and open spaces. By the early 20th century, American planning principles dominated Tucson's urban growth pattern and continue through today. This can best be illustrated through an annotated analysis of four key historic maps of Tucson that document the evolution of morphological vocabulary and cultural attributes of a particular time and cumulatively reveal the incremental transformations reflecting the shift from Hispanic to American town planning models, and values.



“Map of Tucson, AT, 1862” (Fergusson Map, 1862). The map is intentionally oriented to maintain north to the top consistent with subsequent maps below. Courtesy of University of Arizona Libraries, Special Collections, G4334 T8 1862 F3.

The Fergusson Map was created nine years after the American occupation of Tucson and is the first known documentation of Tucson, revealing a culturally Hispanic town beginning to break out of its presidial walls. Established in 1775, the Presidio San Agustín de Tucson (delineated as a faint trapezoidal outline at the top side of the Fergusson Map) was located on the eastern edge of the wide agricultural floodplain of the Santa Cruz River where native populations had subsisted for millennia. Between the floodplain and the presidio's western wall was the Calle Real that connected Tucson south ultimately to Mexico City and on the presidio's south side, the Calle del Arroya (sic) connected with the Calle de la Mision leading across the river to the 17th Century Mission San Agustín del Tucson. The presidio compound was bisected by Calle de la Guardia that formed two relatively undefined open spaces – Plaza Militar and Plaza de las Armas – surrounded by residential quarters whose configuration bore little resemblance to the Laws of the Indies principles.

Lacking a plaza as a generator of urban form, buildings grew along established routes of travel between the presidio, the river, the mission, and points north and south along the Calle Real but few had "complete" courtyard forms. As the need for protection subsided and urban growth moved west and south of the presidio walls, the morphological characteristics of His-

panic town planning began to emerge including street-defining buildings enveloping courtyards and Tucson's most clearly defined urban open space, Plaza de la Mesilla. Morphologically, the plaza in 1862 is clearly enclosed on three sides, dominated by a row of dwellings one-room deep defining a sharp unbroken edge on the north side. However, it wasn't until the American Catholic church constructed Tucson's first cathedral, beginning in 1863 (a year after the Fergusson Map), did Plaza de la Mesilla mark the town's centrality of sacred and civic sense of place. (Van Slyck, 124-125)

In the ten short years since the Fergusson map documented a Tucson dominated by Hispanic social and cultural expressions, the 1872 Foreman map reveals adaptation to increasing American dominance including the conversion to English street names and the adoption of American town planning principles corresponding to the 1785 Land Ordinance outside the greater presidial core of Tucson's Hispanic origins. The map was created to survey and patent Tucson's new incorporated township using the power of the survey grid as a tool to rationalize the physical landscape. It had an even greater impact as a device for the democratic division of land for economic speculation and expansion driven by the town's American newcomers to promote commercial interests. (Veregge, 423)



“Official Map of the City of Tucson by S.W. Foreman”, 1872 (Foreman Map, 1872). Detail of greater presidential area. North is up. Courtesy of University of Arizona Libraries, Special Collections, G4334 T8 1872 F7.

Incorporation signified Tucson as an “American” town to the U.S. federal government, laying out a two-square mile orthogonal grid of parallel north-south avenues and east-west streets that defined standardized city blocks 400 feet square (visible at the top of the Foreman Map). The original Hispanic town layout, based on the organic alignment of the river floodplain bordered by Main Street (renamed from

Calle Real), is now “regularized” by the orthogonal American grid. The original presidio form is less a fortified garrison than a somewhat irregular district demarcated by Main Street on the west, Pennington (renamed from Calle del Arroya) on the south, Washington on the north, and Church Street on the east. By the 1870s, interventions to the increasingly hybrid urban landscape were characterized by the addition of American detached house forms into the existing Hispanic urban block morphology but without conforming to the rules of Hispanic town form, including continuous street facades and courtyard open spaces. (Veregge, 424)

The increasing establishment of American businesses shifted the commercial orientation away from the Hispanic north-south orientation along Main Street near the historic presidio gate to the emerging American east-west commercial corridor of Congress Street (renamed from Calle de la Alegría). Church Street leads south from the original presidial block to the newly enlarged San Agustín Cathedral (Block 217 on the map) that forms the east side of the Church Plaza (renamed from Plaza de la Mesilla). While Tucson was undergoing dramatic social and cultural assimilation—including the growth of protestant churches—the Church Plaza still maintained much of the morphological definition and function of a Hispanic Laws of the Indies urban open space. Even though the Church Plaza was under municipal control, as part of the 1871 township incorporation action, Bishop J.B. Salpointe encouraged

both sacred activities for his predominantly Hispanic Catholic congregation, and secular celebrations to reinforce the civic sense of place of a traditional, centrically-focused, urban plaza. (Van Slyck, 127)

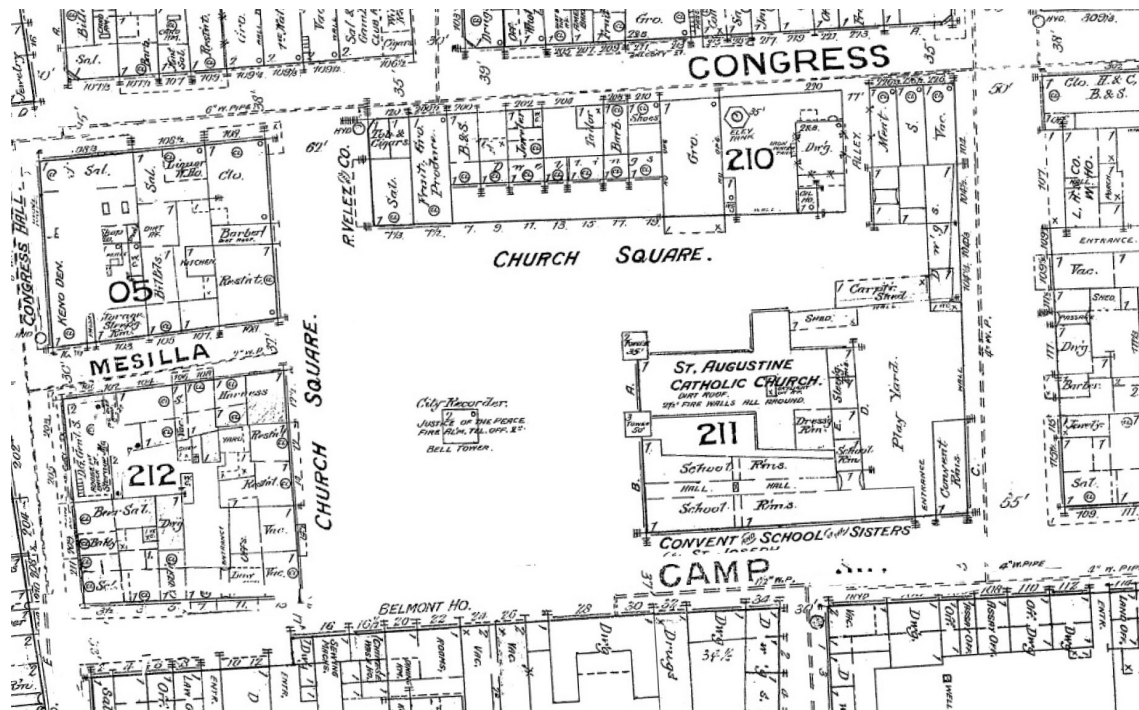
The Church Plaza’s north edge is still clearly defined by the same block of buildings shown in the 1862 Fergusson Map facing inward toward the open space. However, directly after the 1872 township survey map was created, the newly constituted Tucson city council voted to “regularize” Congress Street with particular focus on the seven properties that separated the Church Plaza from the emerging east-west commercial corridor. Property owners were provided additional land on the south (plaza) side of the properties in exchange for removing an equal amount of land from the north (street) side, effectively transforming the properties from their historic plaza-facing orientation to one that faces Congress Street. (Van Slyck, 129)

Sanborn fire insurance maps provide a detailed documentation of Tucson’s evolving morphological character, beginning in 1883 with periodic updates until 1948. By the time of the 1886 Sanborn map, Tucson’s American social, cultural and morphological character was becoming firmly established. The Americanization of the urban character also continued with the English-language conversion of place and building names including Church Square (renamed from Church Plaza) and St. Augustine Catholic Church (renamed from San Agustín).



Digitally generated composite of “Tucson Arizona. Sanborn Map & Publishing Co., July 1886” (Sanborn Map, 1886). North is up. Courtesy of Sanborn Map & Publishing Company / Environmental Data Resources / ProQuest.

The 1880 arrival of the Southern Pacific railroad connected Tucson with both American coasts and affirmed Tucson as a regional mining, ranching, and commercial center. The railroad tracks and depot were located at the far eastern edge of the Tucson township one-half mile from the original presidio, creating a magnet for future commercial activity. Over the next two decades, Congress Street evolved into a commercial corridor connecting the railroad depot with the urban density centered around Main, Pennington, Meyers, and Congress Streets on the west side of the Church Plaza. The locus of commercial activity also shifted away from the town’s initial commercial activities from the edge of the Santa Cruz River floodplain to the east.



Digitally generated composite of “Tucson Arizona. Sanborn Map Co., 1886” (Sanborn Map, 1886). Detail of Church Plaza (page 3). North is up. Courtesy of Sanborn Map & Publishing Company / Environmental Data Resources / ProQuest.

The Church Plaza was slowly diminishing as Tucson's urban focus due to the linear focus of a commercial corridor, typical of American town planning principles, combined with the impact of the 1872 land exchange on its north edge that reoriented the buildings toward Congress Street. This and future Sanborn maps reflect the various phases of incremental transformation of the Plaza's north edge.

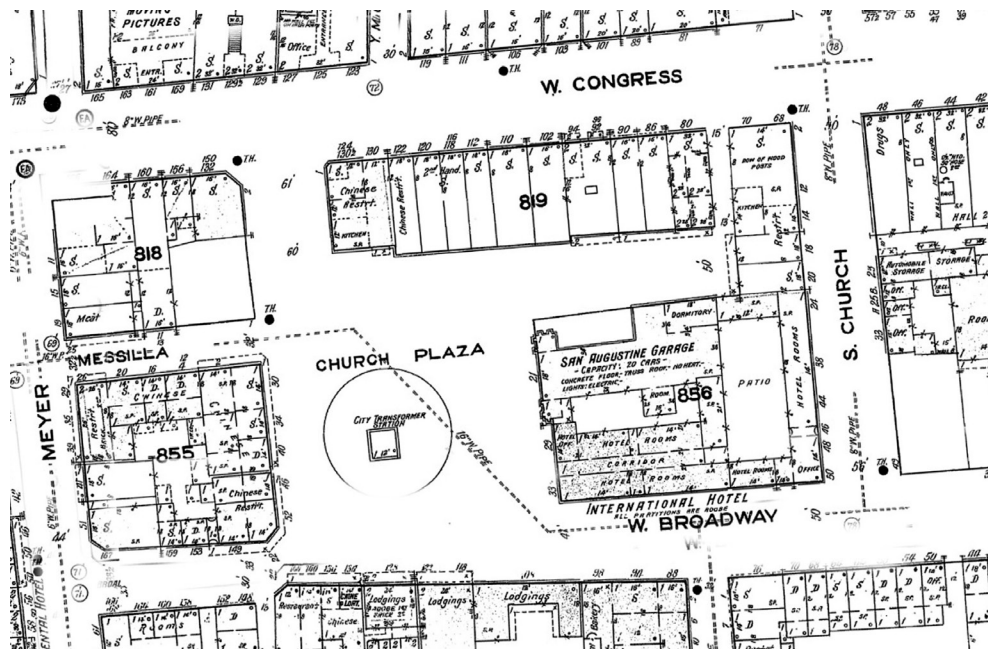


Digitally generated composite of “Tucson Arizona. Sanborn Map Co., 1919” (Sanborn Map, 1919). North is up. Courtesy of Arizona Historical Society, Southern Arizona Division.

Arizona became a U.S. state in 1912, the same year that a second rail line was established in Tucson to accommodate its growing importance as a regional commercial hub and emerging tourist destination. The location of the new railroad depot at the western terminus of Congress Street (seen at far-left side of the Sanborn Map, 1919), combined with the older rail depot at its eastern terminus, confirmed Congress Street as the principal commercial, social, and cultural corridor in the urban life of Tucson.

This transformation of Congress Street was also the death knell for the Church Plaza. By 1919, the reorientation and replacement of buildings on the Plaza's northern edge to Congress

Street-facing commercial buildings was complete. The open space that had long been perceived as the front of the church was now transformed into the backside of Congress Street, a leftover place in the urban fabric. In 1897, faced with this emerging linear urban dynamic, Tucson's Catholic Diocese moved the cathedral three blocks southeast of Church Plaza. The abandoned church accommodated many new functions, including a hotel, a boxing ring, and an auto repair shop (as shown in Sanborn Map, 1919 detail) before its final demolition in 1936. In a further gesture of sad irony, each occupant maintained the now hybridized spelling of the patron saint, “San Augustine”, in their business name.



Digitally generated composite of “Tucson Arizona. Sanborn Map Co., 1919” (Sanborn Map, 1919). Detail of Church Plaza (page 3). North is up. Courtesy of Arizona Historical Society, Southern Arizona Division.

The completed commercial transformation of the Church Plaza marked the ultimate abandonment of Tucson’s Hispanic model of a centric urban form around a civic plaza open space and solidified Tucson’s American model of a linear urban pattern with Congress Street as Tucson’s “Main Street”. (Parkhurst and Jeffery, 6-11; 24).

Conclusion

The merging of Hispanic and American town planning principles reflects an evolution of adaptation and transformation represented in the morphological vocabulary of select towns in the American southwest. The Hispanic Laws of the Indies model was a place-making form to define centrality, derived from its traditional use to mark a symbolically sacred, vertical, axis. The process of establishing the Hispanic town began with, and emanated from, the plaza as its defining feature. The American Land Ordinance model was a linear pattern based on the democratic division of land for economic speculation and expansion along horizontal axes on the physical landscape. The American town planning model did not include the built form, as seen in its Hispanic counterpart, but rather its emphasis on the delineated regularization of the land surface and distribution

of property as a commodity. The morphological vocabulary of hybrid towns in the American southwest, like Tucson Arizona, continues to represent both the Hispanic and American values reflected in the town planning principles that defined and trans-

formed them. While the American model continues to dominate the character of these hybrid towns, the Hispanic character continues to be “reactualized”, reflecting the enduring continuity of the American southwest’s layered cultural landscape.

Notes

¹ The concept of the American southwest is an ethnocentric one, based on American perceptions of political and cultural geography (Veregge, 374) whose region is also referred to as the Provincias Internas, Northern Provinces, Spanish Borderlands or La Gran Chichimeca. For the purpose of this paper, American southwest refers to the region once occupied during the Spanish Colonial and Mexican historic periods, but are now part of the United States including, but not limited to, the states that border present-day Republic of Mexico: Arizona, California, New Mexico, Texas.

² For the purposes of this paper, these terms are used as shorthand nomenclature for what were originally culturally distinct groups: Native (indigenes, often referred to as Native American, Indian, as well as multiple regional cultural groups, e.g. O’odham, Apache, Mayo, Opata, etc.), Hispanic (those of Spanish descent who migrated to the region during both the Spanish Colonial and Mexican historic periods, and in New Mexico referred to as Hispano), and American (those of northern European descent who migrated to the region from the eastern U.S., often referred to as Anglo). These terms are intended to simplify the complex and culturally nuanced labels of identity that continue to be argued by their representative peoples and scholars.

³ Exceptions to this include Taos, Zuni, and other continuously occupied pueblos of New Mexico.

⁴ For a comprehensive review of the architectural manifestation of these Spanish instruments of colonization in the American southwest, see Early (2004).

⁵ This term is used to avoid any politically or culturally incorrect description of the geographic areas encountered and colonized by the Spanish between the 15th and 19th Centuries.

⁶ For a comprehensive review of the town planning principles outlined in the Laws of the Indies, see Crouch, Garr, and Mundigo (1982), Reps (1979) and Violich (1962). Other revisions and additions to this document included specific relevance to the northern frontier, including the “Instructions for the Establishment of the New Villa of Pitic in the Province of Sonora,” issued in 1789 and intended for use in new settlements throughout the northern provinces. While there were other regulations for the establishment of military presidios and religious missions, the Laws of the Indies applied specifically to civil settlements. In New Mexico, where the indigenous towns were early referred to as *pueblos*, the standard terminology was adjusted to avoid confusion, and the types of towns in descending order of size and importance were called *ciudades*, *villas*, *poblaciones*, and *plazas*.

⁷ In the northern frontier settlements, however, the original Hispanic intent was rarely fully realized. Exceptions to this include the towns of Santa Fe New Mexico and Alamos Sonora; see Veregge (1993) and Messina (2005), respectively.

⁸ For a more complete history of Tucson’s Hispanic and American urban development, see Nequette and Jeffery (2002), Sonnichsen (1982), and Veregge (1993).