

Figure 10. Close up of the 1889 Official Map of El Paso, showing what is believed to be the second *acequia* transformed into potable water infrastructure, shown by the dashed red line running east-west along Overland Street.

The Immigrant Experience (Chinese and German)

An exploration of the experience of immigrants in El Paso through their material culture holds potential to lead to a better understanding of the history of Texas, broadly, and of El Paso more specifically. Chinese and German populations are especially well represented in the archival data for this city, as they played important roles in the late-19th to early-20th century growth of this urban center. Chinese businesses were commonly identified as such in Sanborn maps and certain German-named businesses are likewise easily identified. Both groups made significant contributions to early El Paso, and across much of Texas.

As discussed previously, there was a significant Chinese population in El Paso during the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Staski (1984a, 1984b), Farrar (1972), and Metz (1999) have documented elements of the experience of these immigrants to America,

and to El Paso in particular. In El Paso, Staski (1984b) designated a limited area as “Chinatown,” the boundaries of which begin a full block east of the current project area. However, at least three Chinese businesses appear within the project area, suggesting that Staski’s boundaries may not have been as hard fast as previously believed. The first business is a laundry that in 1888 occupied the adobe structure located on the eastern edge of Block 32 at 321 Santa Fe St., on the northeast corner of the de León orchard (see Figure 9). The adobe structure was already present at least as early as 1886 based on the Bird’s Eye map of that year (see Figure 6), and so it seems possible that this structure was part of Ponce de León’s first homestead. A dwelling was associated with the business as well, meaning that the proprietor of the business may also have lived there. By 1893 the business occupying in this building was replaced by a Mexican bakery, which remained until 1902 when it returned to a Chinese laundry. By 1905, the Chinese laundry had either moved or was not recorded. This building was demolished sometime after its last appearance in the 1908 Sanborn map and before 1950.

The second business is also a Chinese laundry at 212 W. Overland St. The 1898 Sanborn shows this location to be a vacant lot. However, the building appears and is listed as a Chinese laundry when it appears in the 1900 Sanborn (Figure 11). A draft of an unfinished historical and architectural survey conducted on behalf of El Paso County and that encompasses much of the project area (HHM 2017) refers to this structure as being in the Chinese eclectic style, supporting the inference that it was built specifically at the request of a Chinese resident. The structure is recorded as a Chinese laundry in 1902 at which time the adjacent business is a tailor. It seems likely that the tailor was an extension of the Chinese laundry; archeological investigation may provide evidence to confirm this association. By 1905, both business locales were converted to dwellings, and the original structures remain in place today.

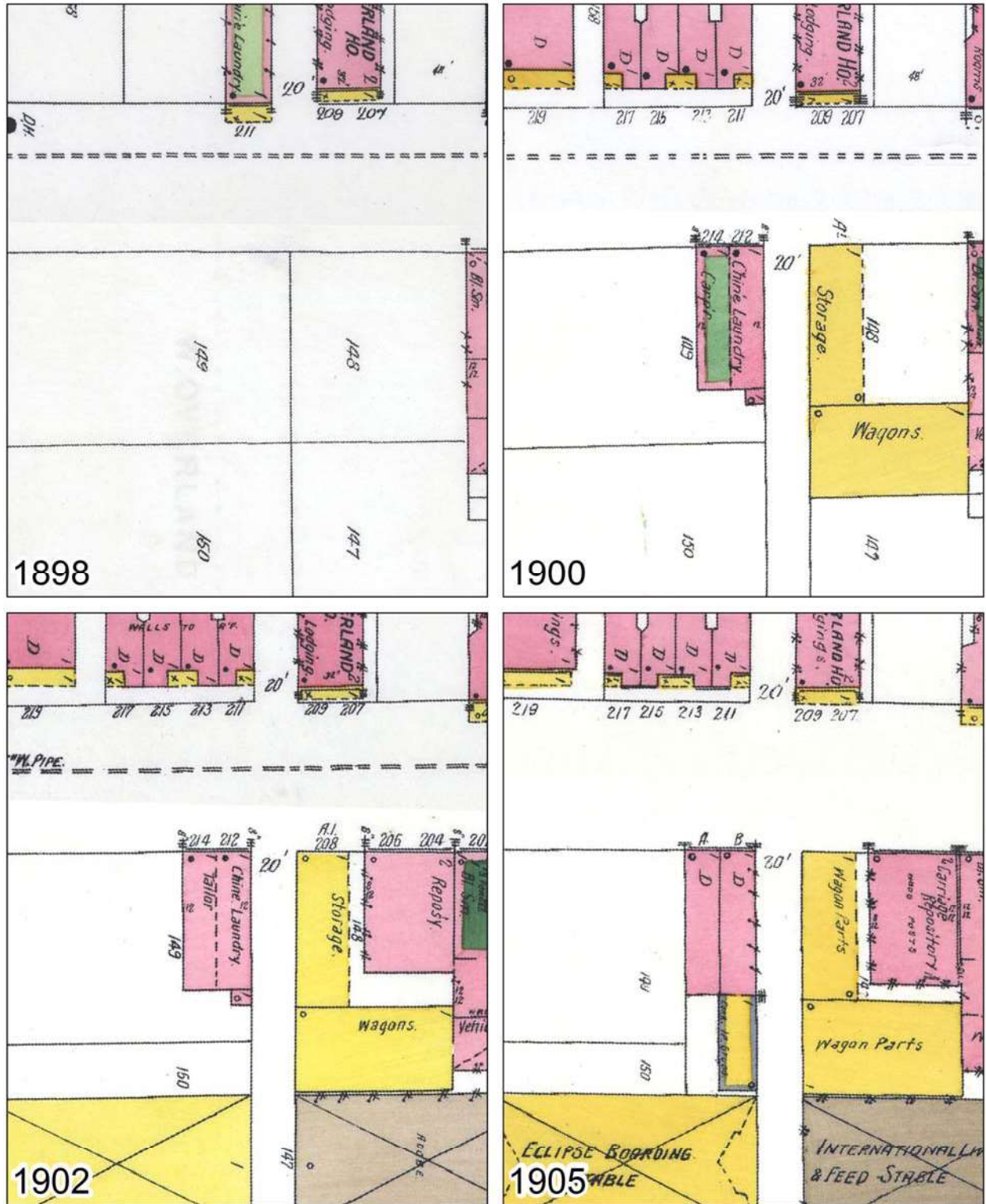


Figure 11. Second Chinese laundry business in the project area.

The third Chinese-run business was located immediately across the street from the previous example at 211 W. Overland St. The building first appears in the 1885 Sanborn map as a tailor shop and remains as such in the 1888 Sanborn (Figure 12). It is then recorded as a Chinese laundry in 1893 Sanborn. It is possible that the tailor was also a Chinese owned business, but this remains to be confirmed. The Chinese laundry still appears in the 1898 Sanborn, but the structure has been either replaced by or renovated and expanded to include dwellings. The structure at 211 W. Overland was demolished sometime between 1950 and 1991.

Based on this information, it is evident that the Chinese immigrant experience was not limited to the boundaries of El Paso's Chinatown as defined by Staski (1984b). One possibility is that these businesses were peripheral to the main Chinese community within the city. Another possibility is that these businesses indicate a somewhat more expansive Chinatown than previously believed. Rhoads (1977) indicates that the Chinese community in El Paso dominated the laundry service industry even into the time when steam laundries were beginning to drive most such facilities out of business elsewhere in Texas. The businesses listed here were in use for only short periods of time, and two of the three properties have been demolished, meaning that there is a high probability that any archeological deposits that were initially associated were also disturbed. However, archeological investigations will nevertheless examine these areas closely for the presence of intact deposits, such as features, trash pits, privies, and other deposits, that may be present and intact.

In addition to the Chinese experience, it is known that there was at least a modest German population in El Paso during the late 19th to early 20th century, as indicated by the names of some businesses on Sanborn maps. Among those that appear within or near the project area are the previously discussed Toenigges' Garden as well as the Germania Hotel, Meyer's Opera



Figure 18. High probability areas for the Immigrant Experience context, with a focus on the locations of the three Chinese laundry buildings.