

Raiders of the Lost Adobe continue work

By JOHN McNICHOLAS
Sentinel Staff Writer

SANTA CRUZ — The Raiders of the Lost Adobe, led by a Cabrillo College anthropology instructor, are continuing their mission on Mission Hill this fall. They are exploring further the remains of a large, unappreciated, undocumented building which dates from the mission's earliest years.

The "Lost Adobe" was uncovered — and partially destroyed — by condominium construction six years ago. Since 1981, Cabrillo's Rob Edwards has led his "raiders" — field study classes of Cabrillo students — in painstaking excavations to assemble a picture of the hill and its inhabitants as they were in the early 1800s.

As Edwards tells it, it's a little like trying to imagine a completed jigsaw puzzle with only a handful of random pieces and a blurred cover picture to look at. But the artifacts and information turned up by the raiders have yielded some possible sketches of the Lost Adobe and who may have lived there, and Edwards hopes to be able to paint a fairly complete picture when he closes the dig, possibly in a year.

This summer's work by Edwards' class uncovered several significant finds, he says.

The stone foundations indicate the

building stood between the Adobe Street condominiums and the Holy Cross convent, across land now owned by Ruby and Jim Tefertiller east of the church. One end of the building's location lies under the convent parking lot, the other under the condominiums.

The adobe was perhaps as long as 250 or 280 feet, comprising a series of small rooms. Its length was comparable to the school street adobe, which in mission days stretched all the way to the plaza.

An adobe doll, a large number of glass trade beads, some unique buttons and other evidence found this summer suggest the Lost Adobe may have been used as a dormitory for unmarried women "neophytes" — Indians being "civilized," and learning the Catholic faith. The School Street adobe may have been used to house male neophytes, Edwards says, rather than to quarter soldiers as some have speculated.

The evidence indicates it may have stood from the 1790s until the 1820s, when it may have been destroyed in an earthquake, Edwards says. It may also have been built and fallen in the 1820s, but the sketchy, dispersed mission records hinder the research. He stresses these hypotheses may change as new evidence is revealed.

It was chance that revealed the building's presence in the first place.

Had it not been for the construction of the condominiums, it may have gone undetected.

An undetected, undisturbed archaeological site doesn't trouble Edwards. But the construction crews destroyed part of the Lost Adobe, and because the site could be threatened by future development of the choice acreage, it should be excavated before it is truly lost, he says.

Santa Cruz' first mission was established in 1791 at the foot of Mission Hill in the area where Santa Cruz Lumber Co. now sits, Edwards says. It was flooded out twice, and the padres moved to the hill in January, 1792.

As many as 32 buildings stood in the mission complex, 19 within the quadrangle. But records make no mention of the Lost Adobe. It does not appear on maps, nor are there any known deeds or ownership transfers for it after church lands were given to private holders in the mid-1830s, Edwards says. This indicates it had fallen down by then.

Among the evidence found this summer which points strongly to the likelihood the building still stood in the 1820s are "phoenix buttons," unique artifacts with an interesting history.

The buttons were originally made for Henri Cristophe, a West Indian slave who played a major role in freeing Haiti from European rule.

Cristophe became King Henri I, and sought to imitate the French imperial court. Fascinated by Napoleon, he took Napoleon's phoenix symbol as his own, and ordered uniform buttons incorporating the symbol. Traders brought the buttons to the Columbia River in the early 1820s, Edwards says, and they spread through the western Indian tribes.

The presence of phoenix buttons indicates the building may have stood during those years.

The layer of roof tiles found in earlier excavations, with adobe bricks standing on top of them as if dumped there, indicates an earthquake may have leveled the building. At least one serious quake is known to have hit the area in 1824, and researchers are combing the more complete mission records at San Juan Bautista, Santa Clara and Monterey to determine if other quakes struck between 1820 and 1835.

The 20 students in the field study class this fall will concentrate on the adobe's architecture rather than its contents.

Field director Charr Smith says students on the dig do more than just provide labor — "They learn archaeology from the ground up, so to speak." A class will be scheduled next summer and fall.



Rob Edwards explains his archeological mission