

# Archaeology

## The Sentinel

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### Wally Trabing's Mostly about People



#### Visit To A Mission Dig

**I**T WAS THE first time I had seen a working archaeological dig. This one was not likely to rate attention by National Geographic, but it had many of the essential ingredients to make it exciting.

There were three separate neatly cut rectangular trenches, two to four feet deep, in the yard of Earl and Ruby Tefertiller on Mission Hill.

Rob Edwards, instructor in anthropology at Cabrillo College, is using the excavations as a "field school" for his summer archaeological students.

The three trenches, aligned in a row, bisect the adobe remains of the old Mission quadrangle. These shallow pits can be read like a kind of functional history book.

In the 1790s, a series of mission chapels was built in Santa Cruz; one was destroyed on the low lands by the flooding San Lorenzo; a second, was on the lip of Mission Hill, where the Adobe Villas condos now stand. It endured only four or five years and collapsed down the hill. The third mission was built where the present Holy Cross Church now stands.

It is said there were some 32 buildings in the mission complex — 19 within the mission quadrangle. The only one to survive is the Neary-Rodriguez Adobe on School Street.

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One especially fascinating trench reveals three historical periods, albeit short ones. Edwards, an archaeological specialist, pointed to a rubble of tile at the bottom of one dig.

"We are fairly certain it is tile from a mission building roof. It was made by Indian neophytes. See the dark band of material in the center. That's the result of the firing technique of that day," said the large, bearded man.

On top of the tile base is the foundation of a soapstone wall, built perhaps to outline an area after the mission property was secularized and divided.

During the span of time indicated in the dig (from the 1700s to around 1830), a barn was built and destroyed by time or man. The old wooden (probably redwood) posts extend down through the soil.

Edwards read three soil pictures to me — three bands of soil color and texture, all brought in by man during various historical periods.

He surprised my eyes by reading where a pit had been dug for dumping trash, then covered. A cross section of earth faintly showed the outline of old disrupted soil. Some artifacts were found in the

trashpit that adds to age reading.

Animal bones, unearthed by ice pick and whisk broom, lay stacked, intact, like a piece of sculpture. He instructed his students not to remove them by hand. Rather they dug around them until they sit on a pedestal of soil.

"Using this method, we now can determine a bit of history under the bones without disturbing it. These bones are from a butchered cow. Age unknown.

"All in all, you are looking at 200 years of history in that hole," he said, rubbing his beard in thought.

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I guess patience is one of the most difficult things to learn in this field. The natural urge is to dig and tear things apart and out of the hole to satisfy a hyped-up curiosity.

Edwards trains his students to move like an old man under water. Ice picks clear away bits of soil and whisk brooms are used to carefully erode seemingly useless shards and objects.

So important is patience that tomorrow Edwards will be closing the dig (lining the bottom and walls with plastic sheeting and filling the holes with soil) without looking under the roof tiles. There may be exciting artifacts under those tiles, but it will have to wait another time.

To me, one of the most interesting aspects of archaeology is interpreting the finds in relation to their time periods. Over to the side, several students were sifting the soil and picking out curious objects.

Some general finds included a clay pipe stem which, by the looks of it, Edwards figures was used between 1850 and 1870.

Old pottery-style marbles turned up, as did a bottle on which are the words: "Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup." It falls under the category of "historic American."

Pieces of pottery can be given a general date by the type of glazing, material and artistic forms on the surface. Nails, glass, toys have distinct ages to an archaeologist's eyes.

One tool of the archaeologist is Carbon 14. It can date material to within 50 to 100 years. Other tools — such as recognition of styles, production methods, records, maps and catalogs — can help narrow the time of use.

Carbon 14 has been used locally to date at 9,700 years a pre-historic campsite near the Scotts Valley City Hall.

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The goal in the "practice" digs on Mission Hill is to determine, if possible, how the crumbled adobe building was used in its day. Who used it? And for what purpose?

There were Ohlone Indians, Spanish, Mexicans and Californians involved in those small rectangular holes.

I was invited into the Tefertiller home nearby and Ruby Tefertiller brought out a tip of a sword scabbard, found in their garden.

The old house is more than 100 years old and part of the continuing history up here.

A side note which gives the place celebrity status is that Buffalo Bill slept in one of the bedrooms when his circus played in early Santa Cruz.

By the week's end, the digs will have been covered, probably until next summer.

Edwards trains his students to accept their rewards slowly.

He calls it delayed gratification.