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Student archaeologist Curt Drake carefully sweeps away dirt to uncover piece of Mission foundation.

Working to save Mission treasures

Archaeology students uncover piece of history at Holy Cross

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A group of Cabrillo College archaeology students and staff are uncovering a piece of buried history by excavating the original foundation of the Santa Cruz Mission.

The excavation is taking place at Holy Cross Church in Santa Cruz. The church was built in 1885 and sits on top of the old mission, which was built in 1792 by Franciscan monks, who used area Native Americans as laborers. After years of severe structural deterioration, the mission was demolished and the church was erected.

Cabrillo's archaeological team was brought in because Holy Cross Church plans to construct a hall in the rear of the property between the rectory and the church. Since the church is considered a historical landmark, it is protected by state environmental laws. That means the church must hire an archaeologist before any major construc-

tion takes place to make sure its historical value is not destroyed during construction.

Rob Edwards, archaeology department head at Cabrillo, is leading the dig. He has a total of 18 students and two Cabrillo staff members working at the site. Work began last week and should continue through part of this week, Edwards said.

So far, the crew has uncovered sections of the mission's original foundation, which surrounds the church. Some of the foundation is buried in about 2 to 3 feet of dirt, while other sections are above ground. Tiles and parts of walls have also been uncovered, Edwards said.

The two-story mission had several sections that included the monastery and a cemetery.

Edwards said there are no detailed maps of the mission, but a sketch of mission grounds was done in 1854. That sketch shows a cemetery extending from the east wall of the present church,

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where now there is a paved parking lot.

Last week when a backhoe was digging a trench that extended from the east wall in order to lay a water pipe, workers uncovered human remains in about 14 inches of earth, Edwards said. The bones are believed to be of Native Americans that probably worked at the mission.

Work was immediately halted and Patrick Orosco, a member of the Ohlone tribe, was called to the scene. Orosco, a Watsonville resident, conferred with Edwards and church officials on what to do with the remains. It was decided that the bones should remain in place and

Orosco performed a ceremony to mark their reburial, Edwards said.

Since one of the mission's walls lies directly over the area that was scheduled for landscaping, Edwards will advise the church to redesign their plans to avoid disturbing the remains.

The students at the dig, Edwards said, are all in Cabrillo's archaeological technician vocational program, a comprehensive two-year training program that teaches students all aspects of conducting excavation projects.

Several "pits" have been meticulously dug. Tomorrow these pits will be open for public viewing. Instead of having an "open house," Edwards said the church will have an "Open Pit."

The public can visit the pits from 1 to 5 p.m.