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USD Class Excavates Old Town Site

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USD CLASS EXCAVATES OLD TOWN SITE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

During the month of January (1975), a University of San Diego team under the direction of History Professor Dr. James Moriarty is excavating the United States House in Old Town Plaza for the purposes of eventual reconstruction.

The United States House (or O'Neill House) has been used as a grocery store, saloon, hotel for railroad workers, and as a school house. Dr. Moriarty's group has also obtained evidence to show that a previous building occupied the site even before the American-period clapboard structure on which they are working. The earlier building was an adobe from the Spanish period.

The group, which averages 17 students and the professor, uses old photographs of the building as well as artifacts such as pieces of household items found on the premises to put together an overall idea of the building at its best stage. That composite is explained in a report which the architects will use in planning the actual reconstruction.

The class is designed for students in all disciplines to give them an opportunity to develop a sense of the past. One of the aspects Moriarty appreciates most is the human quality of the work. USD students have the chance to regain roots of American, Spanish and Indian culture. He refers to the whole area of endeavor as Public, or Historic Archaeology, rather than prehistoric Archaeology, which is much less personal.

The USD program was designed by Dr. Raymond Brandes, Director of the Graduate Division and Professor of History, in 1965/66. The original project was the excavation of Mission San Diego de Alcala, which is still underway during regular school sessions. Dr. Moriarty joined and has directed the program since 1968. Old Town work is undertaken during summer sessions and intersessions by students who spend weekday mornings at the site.

The United States House is the third project for USD, with a fourth planned for this summer. Contracts are arranged with the State of California, and the State Park System chooses sites for excavation. After the team files a final report, private companies may lease the premises for Old Town shops, as long as they reconstruct the building according to plan. Ownership is retained by the State of California.

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