



DownUnder

Ventura Archaeology Case Study 1

BY JOHN M. FOSTER, RPA

As you walk down Main Street in Ventura, your eyes take in the many buildings that line the streets and the people that stroll along the sidewalks. In working the last 34 years in Ventura as an archaeologist, I see something quite differently when I walk down Main Street. I see a 3,000 year old Native American site under the Alinger Museum, the Chumash village of Shisholop at the ocean shoreline, the Mission in the 1780s, the Mission garden wall stretching from Main Street, down the west side of Ventura Avenue, the south side of Thompson Boulevard, and extending back to the north to Main Street within Mission Park. Then there is the first County Courthouse and jail, the saloons, the small homes built within the remnants of the garden wall for the Church faithful. All of these places and people have left their mark and it is my intent to show some of them to you. These examples range from simple historical features to entire archaeological sites. In this case, the focus is on a dog burial found at a proposed housing project in downtown Ventura.

During the excavation of the east edge of the Mission garden foundation, a concentration of bones was exposed. Preliminary observations confirmed that most of the bone was in their correct position and the remains were subsequently detailed. Soil was carefully scraped

Can Oxnard's Wagon Wheel Be Saved?

Mid-Century Roadside Americana in Peril

BY SCHAF

I must admit that I'm surprised how many people I talk to in Oxnard and Ventura who have fond memories of the Wagon Wheel and can't believe it's gone. I have to remind them that the building is undergoing "Demolition by Neglect," but it does, in fact, still exist. The City of Oxnard with its 19 landmarks (compared to Ventura's 100), is known more as



a center of big-box commerce than a center of landmarks. So, I think people have the impression that since the developer of "The Oxnard Village" development has been quoted in the papers as supporting demolition of the Wagon Wheel, it's as good as done. It happened that way 19 years ago at the old Colonial House restaurant site, and now only an empty lot and a fireplace remain.

The Board of Directors of the San Buenaventura Conservancy would like to see the Wagon Wheel restored to its former mid-century glory. Since there are still legal avenues to compel the developer to consider the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the Conservancy has appealed the Oxnard Planning Commission's certification of the Village Specific Plan Environ-

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Did you know...

Views from the Porch

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

CITY OF VENTURA

- **Historic Preservation Committee** [HPC] meets every 4th Monday of the month at 4 p.m., Santa Cruz Room | City Hall.
- **Planning Commission** meets the 1st & 3rd Tuesday of each month at 7 p.m., Council Chambers/City Hall.
- **Design Review Committee** [DRC] meets the 2nd & 4th Tuesday of each month at 4 p.m., Council Chambers | City Hall.
- **City Council** meets every Monday at 6 p.m., Council Chambers | City Hall.
www.ci.ventura.ca.us for agendas and minutes.

VENTURA COMMUNITY COUNCILS

- **Westside Community Council** – for meeting times and locations, please visit website at: www.wcventura.org.
- **Downtown Ventura Organization** please visit website for meeting times. www.downtownventura.org.
- **Midtown Community Council** meets the 2nd Thursday of each month at 7 p.m., Cooper Hall | 65 S. MacMillan Ave. www.midtownventura.org.
- **East Ventura Community Council** meets the 3rd Thursday of each month at 7 p.m., 1st Assembly of God Church | 346 N. Kimball Road, Room E-3. More info – 647-5422.

CITY OF FILLMORE

- **City Council** meets the 2nd & 4th Tuesday of each month at 6:30 p.m., City Hall. www.fillmoreca.com.

CITY OF OXNARD

- **City Council** meets generally 3 Tuesdays per month at 5:30 p.m., please visit their website for exact dates. www.ci.oxnard.ca.us.

CITY OF SANTA PAULA

- **City Council** meets the 1st & 3rd Monday of each month at 6:30 p.m., City Hall. www.ci.santa-paula.ca.us.

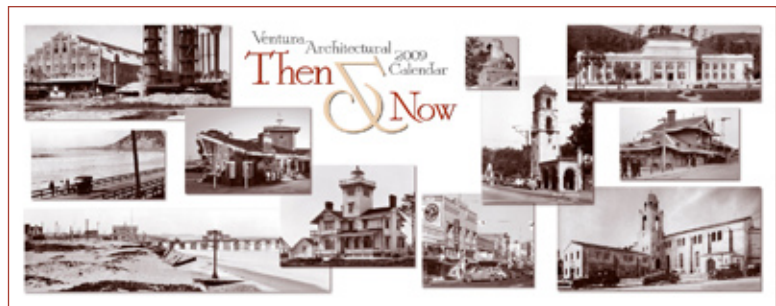
COUNTY OF VENTURA

- **CULTURAL HERITAGE BOARD** meets the 2nd & 4th Monday of each month at County Hall of Administration | Govt. Center. www.ventura.org/rma/planning

The San Buenaventura Conservancy has been getting very busy with new projects after our latest success with the California Preservation Foundation (CPF).

In August, the San Buenaventura Conservancy and the City of Ventura hosted a two-day CPF technical workshop on 'Historic Integrity' and the 'Secretary of Interior Standards.' These workshops were sold-out and turned out to be the most successful in CPF's history. They were so well attended, that the topics and many of the speakers were asked to do an encore of the workshops in Northern California this November. Many local planners and members of the Historic Preservation Committee participated along with members of the Ventura County Cultural Heritage Commission. Among the topics was "integrity of archeological resources" which was presented by the San Buenaventura Conservancy's newest board member, John Foster. We are very excited to have John on our board to give us the "underground perspective" and keep us informed on archeological topics, since he has over 30 years experience digging in and around Ventura. For this issue, he wrote the **DownUnder** column, and will be contributing more in the future.

The Conservancy is in the planning stages for our **Upstairs | Downtown: Downtown | Underground** tours in January. We plan to do more events and tours in the future and hope to partner with other groups and neighborhoods to educate and entertain our members.



This year as a bonus for the first 100 members, the Conservancy will be giving a complimentary **2009 Then & Now Calendar** for all memberships and renewals – a \$15 value. So sign up and mark your calendars for the Tours on January 16 and 17, see you there!

– With history,
Stephen Schafer

...now you do!

Get involved!

02 | October through December 2008

Upstairs Downtown Downtown Underground!

Don't miss our first historical tour-fundraiser of 2009! 'Upstairs | Downtown' – January 16th from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m., and 'Downtown | Underground' – January 17th from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Look for upcoming details on our website! One price for both days: \$10 for SBC Members in good standing and \$20 for non-members. Please check our website for future/additional details.

DownUnder

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from the skeleton and with the use of a spray bottle, a darker soil was revealed around the remains. The animal was found on its left side with the head on the north side of the excavation. The top part of the head was missing although the lower jaw appeared to be in situ (original position).

The skeleton and pit were 1 m north-south by 0.6 m east-west, and 0.5 m east of the Mission garden foundation. The elevation, 60 cm below grade, of the top of the remains (lower jaw) and the top of stone foundation was the same.

The only materials within the soil around the remains were four fragments of Mission roof tile, three in the area of the head and chest. One small rock was found below the chest cavity. One shell bead was found outside of the mottled soil but is not believed to be in association. No other materials or artifacts were observed.

Faunal analysis of the remains identified a dog. The darker soil around the skeleton is interpreted as a burial pit. While the only cultural materials in the burial area are Mission Period tile fragments, the association is tenuous considering the numbers of tile fragments in the general area which might have been inadvertently thrown in the burial pit during backfilling.



The similarity of the elevation of the top of the Mission garden foundation and the top of the skeleton might suggest the same time period, but the association is tenuous since the burial is 0.5 m from the edge of the foundation. In summary, the feature represents a dog burial, possibly during the Mission Period, but dating is speculative.

What is known is that someone took the time to bury that dog and that devotion is evident to us today. Perhaps a small piece of history, but one that gives life to the past. ❧

Wagon Wheel

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mental Impact Report (EIR).

The Conservancy is in support of the vast majority of the Village Specific Plan and in no way wants to impede the development, but a small number of important historic resources are being demolished as a consequence of the EIR certification. A win-win scenario that would allow for retention and restoration of the Wagon Wheel AND a profitable Village Specific Plan development were not properly considered. The Conservancy advocates that 'The Village' would be even more successful if a small parcel were carved out of the 64 acre project to restore and enhance the original Wagon Wheel Motel & Restaurant structures that Martin V. Smith created in the late 1940s.

We see the beautifully restored Wagon Wheel as a visual landmark on the

“ Starbucks and Holiday Inns proliferate at every off ramp, authentic landmarks like the Wagon Wheel are rare – they’re only found in America – and they’re disappearing fast.”

101, just like in the 1950s when the western-themed buildings and animated horse-and-buckboard neon sign served as the gateway to Oxnard. Starbucks and Holiday Inns proliferate at every off ramp; but real, authentic landmarks like the Wagon Wheel are rare – they’re only found in America – and they’re disappearing remarkably fast. The preservation of the Wagon Wheel is an opportunity to restore a world-famous destination, with an authentic Steakhouse and reuse the old motel units as artists studios, a farmers market, an educational facility or neighborhood stores. The Conservancy realizes that recreating the ‘tough’ motel of the last decade is not going to enhance the site. However, preservation law does not require that the site be a Motel. For example, the landmark Oxnard Carnegie Library isn’t a library anymore, but it’s still a vital reminder of an important era in Oxnard’s development. We envision the restored site becoming a magnet within ‘The Village’ and neighboring RiverPark, creating a walkable, park-like amenity next to the two high-rise towers and the 5 story townhomes. It could be a neighborhood restaurant in the middle of the proposed walking trail around the site, some of the motel grounds could be used as a pocket park and the pool could again be used for swimming lessons – like it has in years past. And much of this could be paid for with rehabilitation tax credits and preservation grants.

An unprecedented number of EIR comment letters from all over the country were submitted illustrating the need to retain and restore the historic Wagon Wheel to its former luster. The Project Proponent has always maintained that – despite findings to the contrary by the Oxnard Cultural Heritage Board and historians hired to assess the site for the EIR – the Wagon Wheel must be demolished. The property has rapidly decayed as a result of its closure, (unlike the busy Bowling Alley next door) but the Conservancy contends that it could be easily restored. A small parcel containing the Motel and Restaurant could become a shining example of mid-century, themed, roadside Americana and the entrepreneurial spirit of Martin V. Smith, Oxnard’s most significant developer.

The Conservancy’s concern was summed up best by Martin V. Smith in a 1991 LA Times article, when he was quoted saying, “I live here. I’d hate to see this area become like Orange County around the John Wayne Airport.” ❧

⌘ Board of Directors

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2008 Town Calendar

- 10/15 · SBC Board Meeting [revised meeting date]
- 10/27 · County Historic Board Meeting
- 10/27 · Historic Preservation Committee Meeting
- 11/10 · County Historic Board Meeting
- 11/13 · Mayor's Arts Awards | Elks 6 pm
- 11/18 · Wagon Wheel Appeal @ Oxnard City Council
- 11/19 · SBC Board Meeting [revised meeting date]
- 11/24 · County Historic Board Meeting
- 11/24 · Historic Preservation Committee Meeting
- 12/08 · County Historic Board Meeting
- 12/10 · SBC Board Meeting [to be confirmed]
- 12/22 · County Historic Board Meeting
- 12/22 · Historic Preservation Committee Meeting
- 01/16/09 · Upstairs | Downtown Tour [4pm to 7pm]
- 01/17/09 · Downtown | Underground Tour [10am to 2pm]
- 01/28/09 · SBC Annual Membership Meeting | Elks Lodge

⌘ Mission Statement

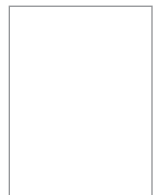
The San Buenaventura Conservancy is a non-profit membership organization that works through advocacy and outreach to recognize, preserve and revitalize the irreplaceable historic, architectural and cultural resources of San Buenaventura and surrounding areas. We seek to increase public awareness of, and participation in, local preservation issues, and disseminate information useful in the preservation of the structures and neighborhoods of San Buenaventura.



Post Office Box 23263

Ventura, California 93002

www.sbconservancy.org



DATED
MATERIAL



Wishing Everyone a Joyous Holiday Season and A Happy New Year!