

COSMOPOLITAN CHRONICLE

True tales from the annals of history, archaeology, construction, and restoration of the Casa de Bandini and Cosmopolitan Hotel.
Old Town San Diego State Historic Park

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Olives

Cynthia Hernandez
Archaeological Project
Leader/Interpreter
San Diego Coast District

The Cosmopolitan Hotel has had many alterations throughout the years. At one point it was used as an olive pickling factory. Nancy Carol Carter in her article "San Diego Olives: Origins of a California Industry" (The Journal of San Diego History, 2008, 54:3, 137-161) notes that in 1900 Edward Ackerman and Robert Alfred Tuffley moved their Old Mission Olive brand processing business to Old Town San Diego. They remodeled and occupied the Casa de Bandini from 1900 to 1919. They used the downstairs for offices, and for processing and pickling activities. Their friends and employees lived in the rooms on the second floor. The next-door Seeley Stables barn was used for processing olives as well.

As part of the Cosmopolitan Hotel project, ASM archaeolo-

gists were assigned to dig test trenches looking for a windmill at the Seeley Stables courtyard, and discovered 25 complete glass jars, and broken pieces, pieces of cut cork, and olive pits. The jars recovered are made of thick clear glass, have a wide mouth, a cylindrical long body with a ring or shoulder close to the neck, and come in three different sizes. The wide mouth allows for easy access to the product. The shoulder is typical of the pickling jars of the early 1900's. They appear to be machine-made. It's hard to tell for sure if these bottles were used for olives because they have no tag or embossing that says what the content was. The corks are a very interesting find. The olive oil that was processed in the plant would be bottled inside long neck glass bottles. Corks would be used to close the bottles, cut flush to the bottle lip and sealed with wax. The corks found by the archaeologists are probably what was left after sealing the bottles: small thin discs, chunks, and cylindrical pieces.

My grandfather in-law, Alfred Whittle, used to pickle his own olives. He used a "lye-curing process" where olives were kept

in a solution of lye, water, and ice cubes (to shorten the cooling time of the lye), changing the mix 3 times every 6 hours. To check if the olives were cured he would keep some olives in plain water and compare the color to the ones inside the lye solution; the cured olives would have a dark yellowish color. Rinsing them afterwards with fresh water, he would keep them submerged for seven days until the water had a light pink color. The final step was to jar the olives in the brine mix, which he made from water, salt, oregano, black pepper, and garlic cloves. The olives should be kept submerged completely in the brine.

