

# Old Town San Diego State Historic Park



## Our Mission

The mission of California State Parks is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.



California State Parks supports equal access. Prior to arrival, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should contact the park at **(619) 220-5422**. If you need this publication in an alternate format, contact [interp@parks.ca.gov](mailto:interp@parks.ca.gov).

### CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

P.O. Box 942896

Sacramento, CA 94296-0001

For information call: (800) 777-0369

(916) 653-6995, outside the U.S.

711, TTY relay service

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### Old Town San Diego

State Historic Park

4002 Wallace Street

San Diego, CA 92110

(619) 220-5422

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*Today's plaza—  
the heart of Old Town—  
recreates the influences of  
19th-century Mexican and  
American California.*



**O**ld Town San Diego State Historic Park pays tribute to the cultural influences that make California special. Restored and reconstructed buildings in Old Town San Diego State Historic Park are now museums, shops, and restaurants that capture the energy of the community between 1821 and 1872. The central plaza is lined with buildings—some dating back to the 1820s—that offer a glimpse of the lifestyles of both ordinary residents and the most wealthy and influential.

### Native Americans

The Kumeyaay lived on the San Diego River at a village they called *Kosa'aay*. For thousands of years, the people migrated between ocean and mountains—gathering seafood, acorns, and the necessities of life. Today a native-plant landscape marks part of the territory of that early settlement before arrival of the Spaniards. At first, the Spanish settlers were welcomed by the Kumeyaay, but challenges to traditional ways increasingly affected their lives. Kumeyaay culture proved resilient, and today many Kumeyaay proudly continue their traditions with modern adaptations.



*Kumeyaay Indians drawn by artist with the 1849 U.S. Boundary Commission expedition*

### A BRIEF HISTORY Spanish Settlement

In 1769 Spanish colonization of Alta California began in San Diego with construction of a military outpost called *El Presidio Reál* and of *Mission San Diego del Alcalá*, the first in a chain of 21 California missions. Directed by the Franciscan padres, mission

Indians cultivated crops, manufactured blankets and clothing, provided construction labor, and raised livestock.

Despite Spain's orders severely restricting trade with other countries, the Spanish padres exchanged otter skins, cowhides, and tallow for manufactured goods and luxury items from the United States, Europe, and China.

### The Mexican Period

In 1822 a Mexican military command arrived in San Diego. Mexico had gained its independence from Spain the previous year.



*Old Town San Diego, 1846*

The small settlement initially consisted of the nearby presidio housing a military garrison, the mission six miles inland with its labor force of Kumeyaay

Indians, and the port where ships stopped to trade for supplies.

Spanish soldiers began building residences below Presidio Hill in the early 1820s. Sun-dried adobe brick was their traditional building material, since wood was scarce. Soon five houses belonging to the Carrillo (and later Fitch), Ruiz, Ybañez, Serrano, and Marron families became the nucleus of the community. By 1825, the adobes formed a rough but orderly street pattern around an open plaza. Two of the finest structures, begun in 1827 and



*Living History participants*

still standing today, belonged to José Antonio Estudillo and his brother-in-law, Juan Bandini.

Residents and visitors often enjoyed the customs and festivities of San Diego. The open plaza hosted fiestas, bullfights, games of chance, and other amusements that offered the opportunity for betting.

### The American Period

San Diego's Mexican era ended abruptly in 1846, when the United States declared war on Mexico. Initially the residents made little resistance to American occupation, but the situation eventually turned San Diego families against one another. Some remained loyal to Mexico, while others supported the United States. The town was occupied and won back several times—one major battle took place in nearby San Pasqual Valley. In 1846 U.S. Navy Commodore Robert F. Stockton captured San Diego. The war between Mexico and the United



*Commodore Robert F. Stockton*

States ended in 1848 with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, establishing a new boundary between the two countries.

James Marshall's gold discovery at Coloma in January 1848 lured adventurers from around the world. San Diego became an important stopover for miners en route to the gold fields, and immigrants crowded into available housing. Adobes were remodeled, and new structures were built. In 1851 prefabricated wood-frame buildings, brought by ship from New England around Cape Horn, were assembled in San Diego.

Following the Mexican War, California experienced a major political transformation—a new State Constitution written in 1849 and statehood in 1850. San Diego was incorporated as a city, and new American laws governed San Diego.

The decline of the military presence and the loss of business related to gold mining soon turned San Diego into a small, insular

community. In the U.S. census of 1860, only seven individuals identified themselves as merchants. Fire was a constant threat, and in the 1860s one misfortune after another struck. The storms of 1861-62 brought high tides and flooding. In May of 1862, a severe earthquake was followed by a smallpox epidemic. Several years of drought devastated Southern California's ranchos and its cattle industry.

In 1867 San Franciscan Alonzo Horton arrived in San Diego to begin building nearby New Town. Old Town enjoyed a slight resurgence in



*Reproduction of Seeley line mudwagon at the Seeley Stables Museum*



1868 when the *San Diego Union* newspaper began publication there. From 1868 to 1874, Albert Seeley operated a thriving stagecoach line between San Diego and Los Angeles. Gold was discovered in nearby Julian in 1869, creating a need for supplies, services, and housing—a boon to San Diego's economy.

However, New Town quickly eclipsed the older settlement. Government offices moved to the new community, taking along much of Old Town's economic base. Hope for Old Town's revitalization died in the spring of 1872 when fire destroyed seven buildings, including the old courthouse.

### Restoration

In 1907 sugar magnate John D. Spreckels purchased the remains of Casa de Estudillo and began the first efforts to revive Old Town.

Public fascination with Helen Hunt Jackson's romantic novel, *Ramona*, led to the restoration of Casa de Estudillo, advertised

as "Ramona's Marriage Place." Its success at attracting visitors led to the restoration of other buildings, which helped renew interest in San Diego's Spanish and Mexican roots. Auto touring brought still more visitors, and several buildings were constructed to enhance the old



Top: Casa de Estudillo; Bottom: Auto touring, ca.1920s

section's appearance as a "Spanish village" in the 1930s.

Old Town San Diego became a State Historic Park in 1968; the process of rediscovering and preserving the historic town began anew.

### CLIMATE

San Diego's mild temperatures offer ideal visiting conditions year-round. With an average of only ten days of annual rainfall, temperatures vary from the high 60s to the low 80s throughout the year. Coastal fog usually burns off in the afternoons.

### LIVING HISTORY

The history of Old Town San Diego comes to life through its museums, period demonstrations, entertainment, programs, and other activities.

Guided walks reveal Old Town's story, and living history interpreters give faces and voices to the people who shaped the town. Visit some of the oldest buildings and historic sites in California.





*Living History: an educational tour listens to a school teacher from 1865*

Today's plaza remains the heart of Old Town, allowing visitors to discover the lives of those who came before them and to better understand California's beginnings.

This park is supported in part through a nonprofit organization.

For more information contact:

Boosters of Old Town San Diego

State Historic Park, 4002 Wallace Street,  
San Diego, CA 92110-2743

[www.boostersofoldtown.com](http://www.boostersofoldtown.com)

### NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve and State Beach  
12600 North Torrey Pines Road  
San Diego 92037 (858) 755-2063
- Silver Strand State Beach  
5000 Highway 75, Coronado 92118  
(619) 435-5184
- Tijuana Estuary Natural Preserve/ Border Field State Park  
301 Caspian Way, Imperial Beach 91932  
(619) 575-3613
- San Pasqual Battlefield SHP  
15808 San Pasqual Valley Road  
Escondido 92027 (760) 737-2201

### PLEASE REMEMBER

- All natural and cultural features of the park are protected by law and may not be disturbed or removed.
- Except for service animals, dogs are not permitted in park buildings. All dogs must be on a six-foot-maximum leash.
- Riding bicycles and skateboards is not allowed within the park.
- When parking in the area, lock your vehicle and take any valuables with you.
- Open containers of alcohol are not permitted in the park.



**Old Town San Diego**  
State Historic Park

**ACCESSIBLE FEATURES**   
 Parking and outdoor restrooms are accessible. The park's seven city blocks have generally accessible pedestrian passages that are closed to private vehicles. Call (619) 220-5422 well in advance to arrange accessible tours. For updates, visit <http://access.parks.ca.gov>.



**Legend**

	Freeway
	Streets
	Accessible Pedestrian Path
	Rail Line
	Fence
	Parking Lot Boundary
	Adobe Wall
	1821-1872 Historic or Reconstructed Building
	Other Building
	Parking
	Restrooms

**Concession-Operated Buildings**

1 Taloya & Sons (La Casa de Machado y Wrightington)	15 Miner's Gems & Minerals (Pedrorena-Altamirano House)
2 San Diego House Coffee & Tea (San Diego House)	14 Toler's Leather
3 Tinsmith (U.S. House)	15 Old Town Theatre
4 Racine & Laramie Tobacco (La Casa de Rodriguez)	16 Cosmopolitan Hotel & Restaurant (La Casa de Bandini)
5 Wells Fargo History Museum (Colorado House)	17 Johnson House (Johnson Building)
6 Cousin's Candy	18 California Indian Market & Jewelry (Alvarado Saloon)
7 Threads of the Past: Living History Activity Center	19 RUST General Store (La Casa de Alvarado)
8 Toby's Candles & Soap	20 Fiesta de Reyes Shops & Restaurants
9 El Centro Artesano	21 Barra Barra Saloon
10 Captain Fitch's Mercantile	22 Wallach & Goldman Square Shops & Restaurants
11 Gum Saan (Dodson Law Office)	
12 Proper Wellness Emporium (Trimmer-Dodson Building)	

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