



OLD TOWN SAN DIEGO STATE HISTORIC PARK.

Altars are an important part of the celebration of Día de los Muertos, a holiday that blends traditions from pre-Hispanic religions of the New World and Catholicism. The altars in the park reflect our historic time period and today. The historic altars can be found in the following museums: La Casa de Estudillo and La Casa Machado y Silvas. Modern examples of altars are displayed in the Fiesta de Reyes restaurants and stores, and the Cosmopolitan Hotel. The parlor of the McCoy House has been set out to resemble the scene of an Irish-American Victorian wake.

Photographs, paintings, or sketches of the person(s) the altar is dedicated to are traditional elements. However, each altar will also reflect a specific region and economic standing of the family. The altar is usually three tiers and covered in *papel picado* (colorful tissue paper).

The colors used in the altars symbolize ideas about life and death.

- Black:** Pre-Hispanic religions and the land of the dead
- Purple:** Pain, suffering, grief, and mourning
- Pink:** Celebration
- White:** Purity and hope
- Yellow/Orange:** Marigold, sun, and light
- Red:** Christianity, the blood of Jesus, indigenous people, and the life blood of humans and animals.

The first level of the altar has four candles placed at the Cardinal points (north, south, east, and west) to call spirits from all points. The two small votive candles represent faith and hope. The three skulls on the second level represent the trinity.

Legend

1. McCoy Musuem
2. Robinson-Rose Visitor Information Center
3. Casa de Machado y Wrightington
4. San Diego House
5. U.S. House
6. Casa de Machado y Silvas (Museum)
7. Casa de Rodriquez (Racine & Laramie)
8. Colorado House (Wells Fargo Musuem)
9. San Diego Court House
10. Casa de Machado y Stewart (Musuem)
11. The Schoolhouse
12. Casa de Estudillo
13. Dodson Law Office (Gum Saan)

14. Trimmer Dodson Bldg. (Tinsmith)
15. Casa de Pedorena y Altamirano (Miner's Gem)
16. San Diego Union Bldg. (Museum)
17. Seeley Stables (Museum)
18. Blackhawk Livery Stables (Blacksmith)
19. Casa de Bandini/Cosmopolitan Hotel (Cosmopolitan Restaurant & Hotel)
20. Johnson House
21. Rust General Store
22. Fiesta de Reyes Shops & Restaurants
23. The Plaza (Washington Square)
24. Barra Barra Saloon

Dia de los Muertos Altars
R Restrooms

On the third level, a large picture of our Lady Guadalupe, the mother of the Giver of Life, and the basic needs of life are displayed:

- Water:** To quench thirst and for purification
- Salt:** To season food and for purification
- Bread:** To represent the food needed for survival

Also displayed in this area are favorite foods, sweets, drinks, and harvest fruits for each family spirit along with personal items of the deceased, such as toys, household saints, serapes, and gourds for carrying water. The fresh cut flowers symbolize the brevity of life.



TRADITIONS OF DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS.

Día de los Muertos is a holiday with a complex history and fusion of old traditions. This view of death started with Meso-American cultures more than 3,000 years ago. Meso-Americans believed that during this time of the year, the boundaries that separate the living and the dead weaken and that the deceased can visit the living. The natives viewed the next world as the continuation of life, as a cycle. To them, life was a dream and only in death did they become truly awake.

The holiday is traditionally celebrated on November 1st and 2nd. The observance varies by region and also by degree of urbanization. In the small towns of Mexico, a candlelight procession to the cemetery is held by most of the families on the eve of the celebration. At the gravesites, family members spruce up the gravesite, decorate it with flowers, and enjoy a picnic. Offerings are brought to the graves and include the favorite foods, beverages,

toys, and personal belongings of the departed so that they might enjoy them again. Family members spend the night at the cemetery and share the memory of their dearly deceased by telling stories about them.

A TIME OF MANY REMEMBRANCES.

October 31st and November 1st & 2nd are important times of remembrance for many cultures. In Celtic countries, October 31st was New Year's Eve, called *Samhain*, a time for honoring departed heroes, family, and friends and greeting the New Year with the sunrise on November 1st. So widespread was this custom that Christians adopted the celebration as the Feast of All Saints. Día de los Muertos retains the ancient celebration of the continuance of life and love for those who have gone before us. Only much later did this prehistoric celebration become the Halloween of jack-o-lanterns, scary horrors, and trick-or-treating.

Thank you for your interest in Old Town San Diego State Historic Park, part of the California State Parks system. Inquire at the Robinson-Rose Visitor Information Center or visit our website to find additional ways to experience California's history.

4002 Wallace St.
San Diego, CA 92110
619-220-5422

www.parks.ca.gov/oldtownsandiego

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DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS.

