

Old Town San Diego State Historic Park Pioneers Reflect California's Historic Diversity

Old Town San Diego State Historic Park [SAN DIEGO county; phone (619) 220-5422] represents life in the Mexican and early American periods of 1821 to 1872. The park, which includes original and reconstructed buildings, shops, restaurants and interpretive features (including museums, exhibits and interpretive programs), is located on San Diego Avenue and Twiggs Street in San Diego.

California has always been – and continues to be – a diverse place. The people who lived in this historic section of San Diego reflect the state's diverse history. These historic residents include Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, African Americans, Asians, Pacific Islanders and people from all over the United States – and all over the world. They made Old Town their home and contributed to its fascinating mix of history and legend.

José María Echeandia was the only governor of California who maintained his home in San Diego while in office. **Pio Pico**, the last Governor of Mexican California, operated a store in Old Town. His mother and sister lived nearby. **Don Miguel de Pedreña** was a native of Spain and one of the founders of new San Diego. His widow owned one of Old Town's – and

California's - first prefabricated homes. The building still exists in the park as the San Diego Union Museum. The house was assembled from pre-cut lumber sent to California by ship around Cape Horn.

Allen B. Light and his partner **Richard Freeman**, African Americans, were proprietors of a combination dry goods store and saloon in Old Town San Diego in the 1850s. Visitors can find his store site in the park's reconstructed San Diego House. Light, an otter-hunter, was known as "Black Steward," legend has it, because of an encounter with a grizzly bear. He had been appointed by the Mexican government as an agent to prevent illegal otter hunting before he became an entrepreneur. Richard Freeman served as the community's sheriff at one time.

William Heath Davis, whose grandmother was a Hawaiian princess, was one of the founders of "New Town" San Diego in 1850. He believed that close proximity to the waterfront would attract business. To that end, he purchased 160 acres of land and, with four partners, laid out the city and built a large wharf and warehouse. An economic depression put an end to that early venture. The William Heath Davis House is the oldest surviving structure in the downtown area. It was one of the first houses built in the "New Town." Davis wrote a book, *"Sixty Years in California,"* which gives a unique look at early California and San Diego.

Juana Machado de Alipás Wrightington, a Mestizo, known as "**Mrs. Wrightington**," was a well-known character in Old Town. A folk-healer and surrogate mother to the less fortunate people in the area, she spoke Spanish,

English and the local Native American dialect, Kumeyaay. She was well respected among Hispanic Californios, Native Americans, and European immigrants who settled in San Diego in the 19th century. She was one of the few residents who lived in San Diego under the rule of Spain, Mexico, and the United States. At one time she created the "*Machado Quilt*," which features a traditional Hawaiian design and reflects the cultural exchange brought by the trading ships to San Diego. Mrs. Wrightington and her children resided in the Casa de Wrightington for more than forty years after her husband's death in 1853.

Jewish merchant **Louis Rose** was an enterprising businessman who once served as postmaster of Old Town. He developed the townsite of Roseville. After he came to San Diego from Texas, Rose became a member of the town's first grand jury and later became city trustee. He was also treasurer of the San Diego & Gila Railroad. The Robinson-Rose building is reconstructed in the park.

For more information about Old Town San Diego State Historic Park, call the park at (619) 220-5422.

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