

Save Our Heritage Organisation Presents

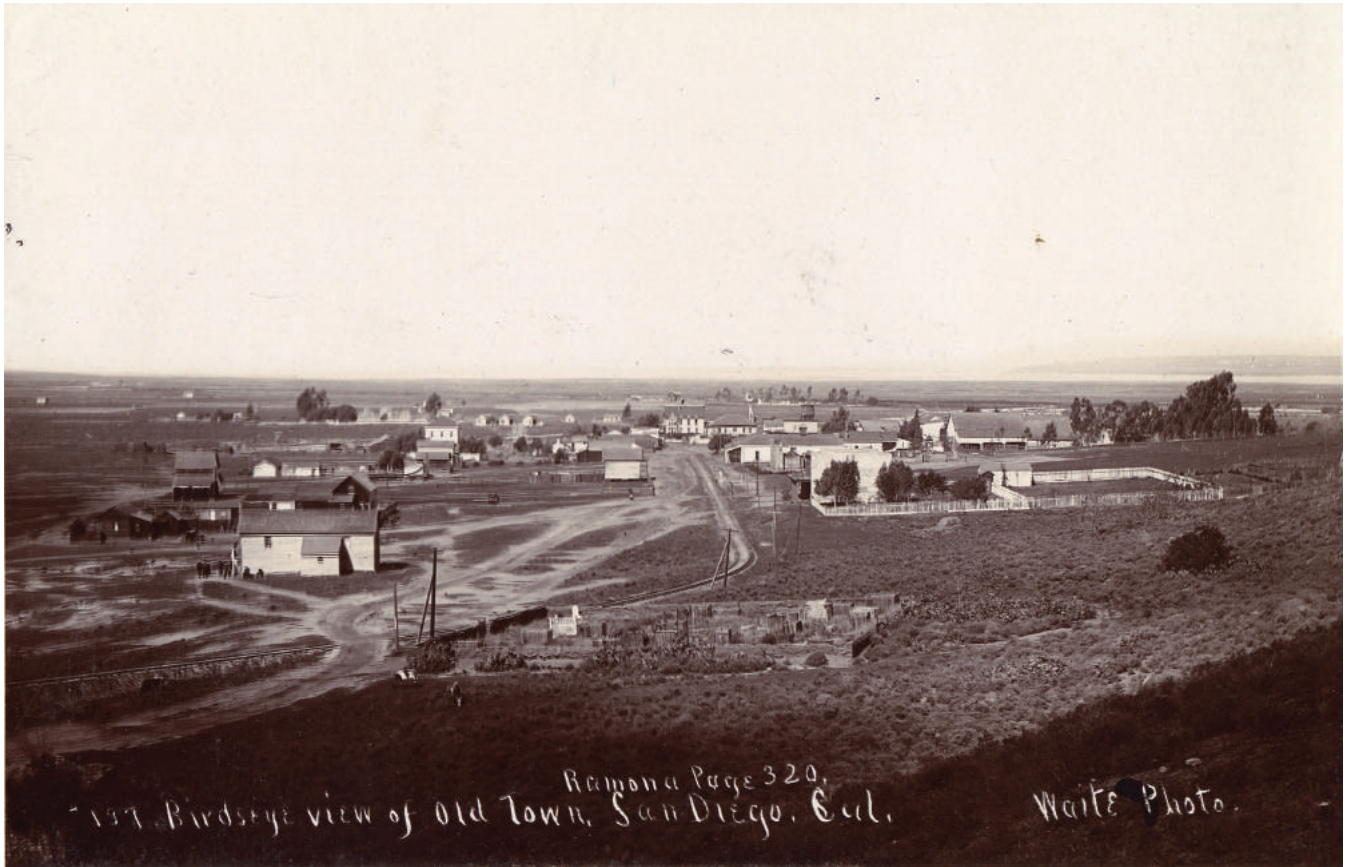
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## San Diego Cultural Heritage Tours

# Old Town San Diego







## Introduction

This self-guided walking tour offers an introductory guide into the rich history and diverse groups of people and cultures that form Old Town San Diego's history as experienced through its buildings, streets, and open spaces. Old Town's architecture is not only varied in appearance and materials; it also provides cultural insights into the lives of the different peoples who once called Old Town home and the cultural influences that make this place unique.

Many of the settlers and soldiers who originally colonized the area in 1769 were of mixed ancestry. Old Town was a veritable melting pot of native Kumeyaay, Spaniards, Mexicans, Portuguese, Peruvians, African Americans, English, French, Germans, Irish, Chinese, Filipinos, Hawaiian Islanders, and more. As Old Town has developed over time some structures have been lost to growth and natural or other disasters. This tour features only original buildings that remain standing and those meticulously reconstructed to appear as they did when new, all originating from the early 1800s through the 1930s.

As you make your way to each location, imagine the mix of people passing you on the street and their wealth of customs and characteristics. We can still see, celebrate, and learn from all these fascinating influences today.



### Old Town San Diego Map

- 1 Ruiz-Carrillo Adobe
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### Key



Street



Old Town San Diego  
State Historic Park



Site Location & Number

N





# 1. Ruiz-Carrillo Adobe

c. 1810-1817, renovated 1931  
4136 Wallace Street

This adobe was home to Francisco María Ruiz, a Mexican-born presidio comandante, and the site of one of California's most famous love stories. Captain Ruiz built this house, c. 1810-1817, next to his 1808 pear orchard. He later gave the house and orchard to one of his godchildren, whose father was Joaquín Carrillo, a close relative and fellow soldier. In April 1829, Joaquín's daughter Josefa Carrillo scandalously left this house for Chile, eloping with Henry Delano Fitch, a Yankee trader and sea captain who may have been San Diego's first American settler. The couple later settled in San Diego. Their tale of bicultural love remains one of old California's most romantic stories. The home changed hands several times, deteriorating gradually. In 1931, San Diego merchant, preservationist, and philanthropist George Marston and associates renovated the adobe and grounds, and deeded them to the City of San Diego for the Presidio Golf Course, which is still in use.



Courtesy Coons collection

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## 2. McCoy House

1869, reconstructed 2000  
4002 Wallace Street

An Irish-born immigrant, James McCoy came to San Diego in 1849 after serving in the U.S. Army, and built this house in 1869 for himself and his wife Winnifred. The Greek Revival, wood-framed home with a columned front porch was a popular style among wealthy 19th-century Americans. McCoy served as county assessor in 1859, was city sheriff for ten years beginning in 1861, and was elected a state senator in 1871. His family hired Modesto María Alto Campbell, the wife of McCoy's deputy, Nicholas Campbell, as their cook. María's mother was a Mission Indian and her marriage to Nicholas shows the diversification and intermingling of different cultures throughout Old Town through the late 1800s.



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### 3. Robinson-Rose House

1853, reconstructed 1989  
4098 Mason Street

James Robinson came to San Diego from Texas in 1850. Familiar with American and especially Mexican land law, Robinson developed a successful law practice and pursued other business interests, including efforts to establish a railroad. He had a long career in public office, including as city attorney. He built this two-story adobe in the Monterey style, developed in Northern California, with the characteristic second-story wooden balcony or veranda, for his second wife and their son. Upon Robinson's death, German immigrant Louis Rose, Old Town's first Jewish settler and an acquaintance of the prominent Estudillo family, bought the building. Rose opened a saloon on the first floor, and enjoyed viewing plaza events from the balcony. He served on the town's first grand jury and later was a city trustee. Like the San Diego Masons' co-founder Robinson before him, Rose was a charter member of San Diego's first Masonic Lodge and both men opened the house to the group's meetings.

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## 4. La Casa de Machado y Wrightington

c. 1830, reconstructed 1985  
2769 San Diego Avenue

José Manuel Machado built this c. 1830 adobe dwelling for his daughter Juana Machado and her first husband, who died in 1835. Juana then married Massachusetts native Thomas Wrightington, who arrived in San Diego in 1833. Although Thomas died in 1853, Juana lived a long and selfless life, remaining in the house until the late 1890s. She became known in the Old Town pueblo as a folk healer and surrogate mother to the less fortunate. She spoke Spanish, English, and the local Kumeyaay dialect, having lived in San Diego under the rule of Spain, Mexico, and the United States. Her generosity and dedication to serving the people of San Diego cannot be understated. Her skills in traditional and modern medicine helped her serve as a nurse and midwife. Juana is pictured below in her home garden surrounded by opuntia or prickly pear cactus, a native plant she often used in her healing remedies.

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Juana Wrightington. Courtesy Coons collection





## 5. Light-Freeman House

1847, reconstructed 1985

2767 San Diego Avenue

This four-room, single-story adobe is named for Allen B. Light and Richard Freeman, prominent African Americans of Old Town, who purchased the home in 1847 from the Machado family. The men, who moved to Old Town together, named it San Diego House and operated a saloon here for many years. Freeman and Light were experienced fur trappers and Light had worked for the Mexican government to prevent sea otter poaching. Freeman was employed in San Diego as a policeman—California's first black police officer—until he died in 1851. The house then passed to his daughter Anita Freeman, who leased the property to businesses before it eventually was incorporated into the American Hotel. Fire destroyed it in 1858.



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## 6. La Casa de Machado y Silvas

c. 1832, restored 1968  
2767 San Diego Avenue

Built by Spaniard José Manuel Machado for his daughter María and her husband José Antonio Nicasio Silvas, this is among Old Town's oldest standing adobe structures. It is also known as Casa de la Bandera (House of the Flag, in honor of María Silvas, who hid the Mexican flag from the central plaza to conceal it from American forces as the Mexican-American War was ending. Casa de Machado y Silvas stayed in the Silvas family for over a century and has since been used as a boarding house, saloon, restaurant, art studio, souvenir shop, museum, and church.



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Machado y Silvas at the far left. Courtesy California State Library





## 7. Colorado House

1851, reconstructed 1992  
2733 San Diego Avenue

The Colorado House, now occupied by the Wells Fargo Museum, was originally a hotel built and operated by Cave Johnson Couts, an American born in Tennessee and a lieutenant in the U.S. Army Dragoons. Renovations allowed the property to house businesses, such as the city's first newspaper, the pro-slavery *San Diego Herald*. In 1886, Couts sold the building to Joseph Mannasse and Marcus Schiller, successful Old Town businessmen in the mid- to late 1800s. Mannasse, a German-Jewish immigrant, was involved in the civic life of San Diego, serving on the City Board of Trustees. The building became a Wells Fargo Agency, with Mannasse as its station master. Schiller was the founding president of Congregation Beth Israel. This building burned in the Old Town fire of 1872 that destroyed many of the structures along San Diego Avenue, and was not reconstructed until 1992.

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## 8. San Diego Courthouse

c. 1850, reconstructed 1992  
2733 San Diego Avenue

Built around 1850 by the Mormons, who travelled nearly 2,000 miles on foot to San Diego to join U.S. forces during the 1846 Mexican-American War, the city's first courthouse was also its first public building made of brick. This reconstruction serves as an example of the work of Mormon soldiers' in assisting the community by making bricks and creating brick-lined wells, walkways, and other fired brick structures. From 1850 to 1869, the building served as the city and county courthouse, as well as a meeting place, church, school, and polling place during elections. The jail cell at the rear of the building is a replica of the kind situated here in the 1850s and used to detain criminals. The courthouse was destroyed in the 1872 San Diego Avenue fire, rebuilt in 1992, and is now home to the Courthouse Museum.

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## 9. La Casa de Estudillo

1827, restored 1906  
4000 Mason Street

Built in 1827 by Captain José María Estudillo, then the presidio comandante, and his family, this adobe became Old Town's social and religious center during the Mexican and early American periods (1820s to 1850). His wife María Victoria was a renowned hostess and compassionate citizen who offered protection within the hacienda's thick walls to less fortunate neighbors during the Mexican-American War. Originally a two-room adobe built on a river cobblestone foundation, the family added rooms in a long row as needed. Then, they transformed it into an L-shape, and finally, a full U-shaped hacienda around a courtyard. In 1906, businessman and sugar magnate John D. Spreckels acquired the grand home, restored it, and eventually opened it as a tourist attraction along his 1910 streetcar line. Its prominence boosted the popularity of Spanish architecture in California. Spreckels commissioned Hazel Wood Waterman, San Diego's first female architect, for the restoration. She employed family-trained Mexican craftsmen expert in traditional clay and adobe skills. As such, this hacienda embodies Mexican, Spanish, and American workmanship.



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Courtesy California State Library



Top left and bottom right by Sandé Lollis



## 10. La Casa de Bandini & Cosmopolitan Hotel

c. 1827, restored to the American Period style 2005  
2660 Calhoun Street

Don Juan Bandini was born in Lima, Peru in 1800 and came to California in 1818. In San Diego, he married Dolores Estudillo, and, after her death, Refugio Argüello. Both women came from influential Spanish Californio families. Bandini, a member of Peru's Spanish upper class, was active in Old Town as a politician, civic leader, and rancher. He built the Casa de Bandini in the late 1820s as a single-story, L-shaped adobe with thick walls in the Greek Revival style. He rose in Old Town society, serving as Governor Pio Pico's secretary and other roles, but during the Mexican-American War he became an ardent supporter of the American cause. Meanwhile, Bandini was enlarging the house into a U-shape. In 1869, Albert Seeley, an American from Illinois with an English wife, became the new owner and remodeled the Bandini House. By adding an American style wood-framed second story and balconies, Seeley created this vibrant, living example of Old Town's development through the Mexican and American periods. Historians consider it one of the most noteworthy buildings of 19th century California.



Courtesy Coons collection

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# 11. Mason Street Schoolhouse

1865, restored to the American Period 1952  
3966 Mason Street

This schoolhouse was the first publicly owned school in San Diego County. The one-room space with a wood frame and shingled roof relied on a wood burning stove for heat during the winter. All roughly 42 students in eight grades learned at the same time within this room. A third of them could be absent on any given day due to the demands of ranching life. Mary Chase Walker, the first teacher of the school, was a controversial figure in Old Town due to her friendships with multi-racial women. She once invited a black woman to lunch at the Franklin House, a fine hotel, causing some diners to storm out. Her student enrollment dropped drastically in objection. After her teaching career, Walker's work was focused on the women's suffrage movement and helping the poor.

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## 12. La Casa de Machado y Stewart

c. 1835, rehabilitated 1968

2707 Congress Street

As with the Casas de Machado y Silvas and Machado y Wrightington, José Manuel Machado generously constructed adobe homes for his daughters. This one was for Rosa, the youngest daughter, and her husband Jack Stewart, a sailor and carpenter from Maine. Originally just two rooms, Rosa and Jack continually improved their home, adding more rooms and a tile roof, and maintaining its lime-washed walls. In the 1850s, they built an open porch for gatherings. This couple's home and long relationship showcases the success of interracial marriages in San Diego.



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### 13. The Church of the Immaculate Conception

1919, reinforced 1998  
2540 San Diego Avenue

The Church of the Immaculate Conception answered the growing needs of Old Town for Catholic religious services. Father Antonio Ubach, who began his prolonged service as Old Town's pastor in the 1860s, initiated a project to build a brick Gothic style church. Construction began in 1868, but the priest halted work when New Town San Diego overtook Old Town in development and population. The building stood incomplete for 46 years until it was razed. Today's Church of the Immaculate Conception was completed in 1919 in the Spanish Revival style to honor the Spanish soldiers who brought Catholicism to this area in 1769. One of the San Diego Mission's original bells, pealing from the bell tower, still calls the faithful to worship. From adobe to Gothic to the Spanish Revival style, this site demonstrates Catholic devotion and architectural eras over hundreds of years in Old Town.



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## 14. The Whaley House

1857, saved from demolition and renovated by the County of San Diego 1958  
Restored to the 1868-1871 period by SOHO, 2001-present  
2476 San Diego Avenue

Thomas Whaley of Brooklyn, New York, designed and built this fine two-story house for his family after moving to California for the Gold Rush. The oldest brick home in San Diego, this rare Greek Revival residence showcases one of the new types of architecture that Americans brought from the east in the 19th century. The Whaleys shared their private home with other income-producing ventures, such as a general store, county courthouse, and San Diego's first commercial theater. Thomas's wife Anna was of French descent and her immigrant mother lived with the family in later life. It was common at this time for couples from different cultures to intermarry and become bi- or even trilingual. Businessmen such as Thomas Whaley found it important to speak the languages of their customers. In addition, in the mid-1870s, the Whaley family employed Ts Yow, a young Chinese immigrant, as a cook and for property maintenance.

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Photo by Sandé Lollis



Historic photos courtesy SOHO



## 15. The Chapel of the Immaculate Conception (Adobe Chapel)

1850, reconstructed 1937

3963 Conde Street

This intimate chapel was initially built as a house by Connecticut settler John Brown, who arrived in Old Town after the Mexican-American War ended in 1848. He came west with hopes of becoming a cowboy, but instead became San Diego's first coroner. Brown married a Spanish woman, and together they had five children; he built this original two-story adobe home for his family. In 1858, Don José Aguirre bought the property from Brown, and converted the house into a public chapel for local residents. This site also is the fictional wedding place of Ramona, the heroine of the novel of the same name by Helen Hunt Jackson. Jackson partly wrote this 1884 novel to publicize the plight of Southern California's dispossessed Mission Indians. This sentimental portrayal of Mexican Colonial life contributed to a unique cultural identity for the region and was a courageous woman's progressive attempt to advocate for Native Americans.

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Historic photos courtesy Coons collection  
Bottom right by Sandé Lollis



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