

# ARCHAEOLOGY AT SAN DIEGO STATE

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## ABSTRACT

Archaeology at San Diego State University over the past 4 decades provides instructive examples of how the discipline evolved in southern California. In the 1960s and 1970s, SDSU's local archaeology program was dominated by Paul Ezell, who directed investigations that spanned the transition from "salvage" archaeology to cultural resource management. In 1971, the department established a modest contract program. In the late 1970s, the program changed directorship and became the home of the state clearinghouse. After 1985, the program declined, ending with the removal of the clearinghouse from the Anthropology Department in 1987. Except for work at the San Diego Presidio, SDSU has done little local archaeology until the recent excavations at the Penasquitos adobe.

### THE EARLY YEARS: 1960-1980

Although there were several archaeologists on the staff at San Diego State College in the 1960s and 1970s, including Don Brockington, Dick and Betty Shutler, Larry Leach, and later, Joe Ball and Brad Bartel, the discussion of SDSU's participation in southern California archaeology must focus on the role of one professor, Paul H. Ezell. Ezell came to SDSU in 1956 immediately after finishing a doctorate at the University of Arizona. In his early years at State he continued his involvement in Arizona archaeology, conducting field work and acting as a consultant to the Gila River Pima Maricopa Indian Council on Indian Land Claim actions. Students had the opportunity to work with some of his Arizona collections during this period, and he participated in San Diego area archaeology as an advisor to students. He conducted some weekend surveys with students at San Diego State in the early years of the 1960s, but it was not until 1964, with excavations at the C.W. Harris site,

that he undertook a major project in the area.

In the spring and summer of 1964 Ezell's crew at the Harris site excavated trenches and units at 2 of the major loci of the site (Carrico et al. 1991:3.7). This work resulted in a large collection, and data on large features in the upper levels of the site that appear to be associated with the Milling Archaic or La Jolla occupation of the site. A number of meeting papers and at least 3 articles resulted from this work, including a paper on asphaltum as a hafting material for some of the bifaces (Ezell 1977), and a paper on the position that he reached late in his life that the site was atypical of the San Dieguito complex (Ezell 1987).

During his early years at San Diego State, Ezell was instrumental in establishing the Cultural Anthropology Laboratory. This facility, staffed by a half-time student, was a curatorial facility for the ethnographic and archaeological collections of the department, as well as the location for the SDSU site

files. Ezell brought a site recording system to State patterned after those he had used in Arizona, and it operated independently of the state system (then at UCLA for San Diego County) until SDSU became a clearinghouse. Those site files have since been incorporated into the clearinghouse records and assigned SITS numbers, but prior to the coming of the clearinghouse, San Diego State assigned numbers like Cal:E:4:14, which provided information about the location of the site within the geographic area covered by the system (essentially San Diego and Imperial Counties). The lab also maintained a file of student papers and site reports, as well as other data on the sites in the SDSU site record system. The curatorial facility became the CRM Center in the late 1970s (see below).

A major turning point in the development of a southern California archaeology program at San Diego State was the initiation of excavations at the San Diego Presidio in 1965 by Don Brockington and Ray Brandes (Brockington and Brandes 1965). After Ezell's return from a year in Bolivia, he assumed directorship of the excavation, which was run as a field class offered essentially year-round. That excavation, and its successors at the Presidio, provided a training ground for many of the archaeologists who practice archaeology or influence its practice in the San Diego area today. Ezell's excavations focused on the chapel and associated structures, and provided students with experience in excavation of architectural features, in recognizing historic and prehistoric artifacts, and in basic field and laboratory procedures (Ezell 1968, 1976, 1982; Colston 1982).

One aspect of the site that has had a great effect on the conduct of archaeology in the San Diego area is that the Presidio had some clear stratigraphy associated with the construction and occupation of the fort, its deterioration and ruin, post-abandonment dumping, and its ultimate burial by workers bringing in imported fill to cover the site in preparation for park construction. This was a site with ample examples of the workings of the law of superposition and was a site where metric stratigraphy, the careful excavation in arbitrary levels worked. Through

no fault of Ezell's, the early experiences with such a site led to the widespread faith that metric stratigraphy was as meaningful at prehistoric sites in nondepositional environments in the San Diego area, a fact that has generated a lot of confusion about the area's prehistory.

In 1970, the field class offerings at San Diego State were expanded to include concurrent classes at the Presidio and the Bancroft Ranch House in Spring Valley (Carrico and Ainsworth 1974). Bancroft provided students more experience with prehistoric materials, and a site where the excavations were not carried out in architectural features. With 2 field classes going, students were expected to do their introductory class at 1 of the sites and to do their advanced class at the other, to broaden their experience base. The students in the advanced class served as supervisors for the beginning students, so they gained experience in running field crews. Each site also had a student foreman, providing students the opportunity to exercise greater judgment and responsibility.

At both sites, Ezell's commitment went beyond gathering data and educating students; he also felt that public education and participation were important parts of the program. Students were routinely assigned to guide tours through the excavations, as he thought this was an especially good way to reinforce what they were learning. He also provided opportunities for elementary and college students to work alongside the college excavators in formal programs with the schools.

Ezell also established cooperative programs with local community colleges. Mesa College classes under Mike Axford and Diane Barbolla worked at both the Presidio and at Bancroft, and Southwestern College classes under Charlotte McGowan worked at the Bancroft Ranch House.

In 1971, Ezell contracted with Caltrans to conduct data recovery excavations at Buckman Springs and Cottonwood Creek, two important prehistoric sites that were to be impacted by the construction of Interstate 8. Ezell supervised these excavations

with graduate students as field directors, and he continued his normal summer program of excavation at the Presidio and Bancroft. These excavations were conducted in the days when agencies funded fieldwork but did not consider reporting as part of their obligation. It was Ezell's intention that the data from these excavations would form the basis for master's theses, but circumstances conspired against him. Although progress reports and at least 1 draft report on Cottonwood Creek were prepared (May 1971), these sites have never been fully reported. Articles by Ron May (1974, 1976) have appeared based on this work, and a number of student papers were written in an analysis class Ezell taught. The crew list for these projects reads like a who's who of the agency cultural resource personnel and the management of firms conducting cultural resource studies in the San Diego area today.

The year 1972 was a watershed for the program at San Diego State. The impact of the Friends of Mammoth decision was just being felt, and agencies were beginning to require that archaeology be done on private as well as public projects. As people cast about desperately for archaeologists to perform the work, Ezell organized the Public Archaeology program to deal with these needs. Using advanced students, Ezell established procedures for contracting archaeological services through the San Diego State University Foundation. Through a process of lengthy discussion with other professionals and his core of advanced students, he established minimum qualifications for the people to conduct the surveys and for the crew members to be involved. He was very concerned with the quality of the products, and he routinely reviewed reports before they were submitted, and could be a brutal editor.

Among his concerns in establishing this program was that we were providing professional services and should be compensated at professional rates. He did extensive research into what comparable services cost and developed a reasonable set of charges and pay. The program produced methods of costing projects, tracking them, and accounting that influenced the management

of projects at many of the firms that were later to employ his students.

He was also concerned that those of us who participated in the program be up-to-date on the laws and practices of the developing field of cultural resource management. Towards that end, he sent a representative to the 1974 Cultural Resource Management Conference in Denver, and offered a special topics class in cultural resource management. Students in that class explored existing and proposed state and federal legislation, as well as the local implementation of the regulations about cultural resources. Members of the class discussed and debated standards, and had some heated exchanges on just how much leeway agencies had or should have in interpreting the regulations.

Ezell had a firm conviction that archaeology was not a private club for professional archaeologists and students alone. His work with local high schools and elementary schools has already been mentioned. One of the articles of which he was most proud was one he was asked to write for an educational journal (Ezell 1973) that described what he called "Some Fringe Benefits of Archaeology" (Ezell 1972). In this paper he discussed how participation in an archaeological project could provide a focus for students who were at risk in school and could help make much of the curriculum more meaningful to them. In keeping with his conviction that archaeology was too interesting to be kept to the professionals, he helped a group of local avocational archaeologists found the San Diego County Archaeological Society, and served as its scientific advisor for many years. He provided advice and served as a technical advisor on several early SDCAS projects, including the excavations at Bon-sall, in northern San Diego County.

The Public Archaeology Program conducted a number of important projects under Ezell's supervision, including some of the first surveys required by CEQA in San Diego County. A contract with Caltrans led to a number of right-of-way surveys in San Diego and Imperial Counties, and in 1973 resulted in an emergency data recovery program at Kitchen Creek (May 1975). Ezell

directed survey and test excavations at Camp Pendleton, as well (Bull 1975; Ezell et al. 1978, 1980; Welch 1975).

Ezell continued to teach until his retirement in 1975. He offered the excavation classes, introductory courses in physical and cultural anthropology, analysis methods, California Indians, and topical courses on Southwestern and California prehistory. His long acquaintance with Malcolm Rogers and Julian Hayden allowed him to provide his students with unique insights into Rogers' work, and he drew heavily on his Harris site experience, as well as his work in Arizona, in providing excellent discussions of regional culture history. In the late 1960s and early 1970s he also tried very hard to expose us to the rapidly developing New Archaeology, even though he didn't really think that much of it was truly new.

Ezell retired from San Diego State University in 1975. After his retirement, Ezell continued his association with the University as an Emeritus Professor, and served as an advisor to the Mesa College Presidio Gateway project. He also collaborated on projects with Westec Services in San Diego, including some additional work at the Harris site (Carrico and Ezell 1978).

In reflecting on the period, Ezell's contributions to local archaeology loom large. His excavation class and Public Archaeology program produced the people who established many of the companies that performed cultural resource management studies in the early days of southern California CRM, and many of those companies survive today and are still influential in the field. In addition, many of those who have the responsibility for oversight of cultural resource policy and compliance at the county, state, and federal level got their start in Ezell's classes.

One other observation is pertinent in closing this portion of the paper. Although my discussions have focused on the role of Paul Ezell in developing excavation classes and the Public Archaeology program, the entire Department of Anthropology at San Diego State University made significant contributions to local archaeology in providing a

high quality education in the breadth of anthropology as a discipline. They required that their students have a broad education that included training in all areas of the discipline. In addition, excellent archaeologists whose specialties were in areas outside San Diego provided provocative courses and counsel in the conduct of archaeology and helped us see beyond the narrow geographic limits within which we worked. Larry Leach, who directed excavations at the Handyman and Edgemere Avenue sites in 1975 (Leach 1975), also taught an excellent course in archaeological method, as well as North American prehistory and primitive technology, and served on graduate committees. Both Richard and Betty Shutler brought experiences to classes and seminars, and Betty, in her role as department chair, encouraged us to participate in local archaeology. She provided both encouragement and support, and was quick to prod us into getting out the results of our work. Lois Lippold, primarily a physical anthropologist, also worked with local archaeologists on projects, and did some CRM work in San Diego.

In short, Ezell provided the impetus and the specific programs, but the department provided an educational atmosphere that allowed that program to flourish. One negative aspect of the period is that the graduate students didn't come through: the site reports that were to be master's theses did not get written. Ezell died before he could finish his reports on either the Harris site or the San Diego Presidio. Like his friend, Malcolm Rogers, he died leaving his major projects unfinished.

In the late 1970s a replacement for Ezell, Mark Grady, was selected to teach at San Diego State and to work with the contract program. He was killed en route to assume his new duties. That position was never filled.

## 1980 TO THE PRESENT

The decade of the 1980s was a time of change and turmoil at San Diego State University. While many of the trends set in motion in the 1970s continued until 1984, the

later years of that decade were a time of overwhelming decline of local archaeology at San Diego State. In retrospect, the loss of the funding to replace Paul Ezell was the beginning of this decline. Without a committed leader in cultural resource management or California archaeology, the rejection of a local archaeology emphasis was inevitable.

The first trend that continued into the 1980s was a focus on local archaeological excavation, with analysis and report writing as secondary concerns. The 2 big projects conducted by SDSU were the La Fleur Site Project, excavation of a 5,000-year-old Early Period site, and the Ruiz-Alvarado Adobe Project, a 150-year-old historic ranch house. The second trend was the continued use of SDSU students for these projects, training them as professionals for positions in the private or government sector.

The La Fleur Site Project, conducted by Joe Ball, consisted of excavation in 1979 and analysis in 1980. The project was conducted as a field school through the Anthropology Department, not a project of the CRM center. The site produced significant information for the culture chronology of the area. While many attempts have been made to analyze the data from this project, a single master's thesis is the only published data (Christenson 1981).

The Ruiz-Alvarado Adobe project was a bold undertaking by the CRM Center in 1982-83. Beginning with 2 seasons of excavation, the plan was to conduct historic, archaeological, and architectural research with a goal of preservation and restoration of the ranch house. The Project Investigator was Fred Kidder, a graduate student who also was in charge of the CRM Center. Field cataloging and preliminary analysis of ceramics and lithics was conducted. Kidder died before a report was produced.

Under Fred Kidder, and Chris White, an adjunct professor, the CRM center was an integral part of the archaeological community, and published a series on local archaeology called the Casual Papers. The goal of the publication was to "simply provide information related to cultural resources in

San Diego County of potential interest, in as timely a fashion as possible" (Kidder 1983:166). This series provided an opportunity for local archaeologists to publish outside the gray literature, as well as a forum for introduction of new ideas or discussion of controversial issues. In addition, Fred introduced computers to the Department and to the CRM Center, and was one of the first state-wide to computerize site record data. He enhanced the laboratory facilities at SDSU, updated camera equipment, and began a series of ambitious projects in conjunction with numerous government agencies.

The Society for American Archaeology meetings were held in San Diego in 1982, and San Diego State was the host. Professors, students, and members of the local archaeology community contributed to a successful meeting.

An economic recession in 1981-82 led to the elimination of many fledgling archaeology firms and consolidation of others. As a result, many people previously trained in archaeology at SDSU returned for advanced degrees.

The Department planned a museum, in an attempt to bring anthropology to the public. A room for the museum was designated, display cases were acquired, and collections were set aside to be displayed.

A series of misfortunes, beginning in 1984 with the death of Fred Kidder, resulted in major changes. Without a faculty member firmly committed to the preservation of a California archaeology program within the Department, there was no support for continuation. Many of the projects begun under Kidder's guidance were never completed or reported. The Ruiz-Alvarado Adobe deteriorated significantly, and no further work has been done at the site. Computerized data bases and site records could not be accessed. Accusations of mismanagement and misappropriation of funds resulted in feelings of distrust and uncertainty throughout the university and the archaeological community. The results of these misfortunes brought about the decline of the CRM Center, the downfall of the mu-

seum, and the rejection of local archaeology by the Department. No more excavation projects were conducted, and the Casual Papers ceased publication. Eventually the CRM Center, now known as the South Coastal Information Center (SCIC), was ejected from the Department. The years in which SDSU was a leader, or at least an integral part of the archaeological community, were over.

The professional leadership in archaeology shifted to the environmental firms. The Department shifted focus to Mesoamerica and Old World archaeology. A field school conducted at the San Diego Presidio between 1987 and 1990 focused on teaching European techniques of excavation. The Project Investigator wanted to compare Roman fortified towns with Spanish fortifications in the New World.

## FUTURE PROSPECTS

While the situation was bleak for about 6 years, it appears to be changing for the better. First, 2 field schools are now offered each year, 1 in Utah and 1 in San Diego. Both have been enthusiastically received by students and the professional community. Second, the SCIC is now affiliated with a faculty member, although a part-time faculty member, in the Anthropology Department, and it employs and provides internships for students. Third, a 10-year Department review was conducted in 1991, and it recommended 2 changes; 1 was to hire a local archaeologist as a faculty member, and the other was to revive the museum planning. Severe state funding problems have prevented initiation of these recommendations. And fourth, money has been acquired to catalogue artifacts as well as the ethnological collections currently in storage at SDSU. A 2-year project, the goal is curation to federal standards.

Even the evaluators for the departmental review noted the devastating effect of the misfortunes suffered by the Department in the mid '80s. It noted that time has yet to soften the bad feelings. However, the Department appears to be making an attempt to rectify past mistakes and to return to a positive role in local archaeology.

## Postscript

Since this paper was presented, the Anthropology Department at San Diego State was first eliminated, and then suspended. This decision was in response to the state funding crisis, where the administration chose a "narrow and deep" method of budget cutting. In this approach whole departments were eliminated. Anthropology was 1 of 9 such departments. All full-time Anthropology faculty received termination notices, which were subsequently postponed for 1 semester. More recently, the University Chancellor has rescinded the departmental terminations, but Anthropology's status within the academic community at SDSU remains unknown. This situation continues to change, and the fate of the Anthropology Department is questionable.

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