

UNR students excavating 19th century Virginia City hospital

UNR in cooperation with the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office is sending a team of archaeologists to excavate the site of one of Nevada's most important early hospitals. St. Mary Louise Hospital in Virginia City opened in 1876 and served the mining community until the early 20th century.

Sarah Cowie, assistant professor of anthropology in the University's College of Liberal Arts, will direct the excavation, which is part of a summer field school in archaeology. Cowie's team consists of 12 undergraduate students, three graduate student field supervisors and volunteers.

The Daughters of Charity opened the hospital as a Catholic facility, although the institution accepted patrons of any faith. They wore a distinctive habit with a starched cornette on the head, made famous in the late-1960s television show, "The Flying Nun." The order had an active vocation that sought to administer to people in need. Opening an orphanage and school, and then operating a hospital in what was a remote mining community, fit nicely with the mission of the Daughters.

The excavation of the St. Mary Louise Hospital grounds continues a tradition dating back to 1990 of UNR archaeologists working with support from the Historic Preservation Office and the Comstock Historic District Commission to examine resources in Virginia City. Previous excavations included work at Piper's Opera House, an African American saloon, Chinatown and a residential neighborhood known as Cornish Row. The discoveries of the archaeologists

have been made available to the public through tours, exhibits, websites, lectures and publications.

The State Historic Preservation Office and the National Park Service provided funding for the dig at the St. Mary Louise Hospital excavation site, located at the current St. Mary's Art and Retreat Center, 55 R St., Virginia City. The public is welcome to visit the site while the team is working there, Mondays through Fridays, 9:30am to noon and 1 to 3pm. They expect to conclude their work Aug.15.

Artifacts from the project will be brought back to the University's Historical Archaeology Lab, where they will be analyzed, cleaned, conserved and entered into a database. Within about a year, they will be curated at the University's Anthropology Research Museum.