

## **Women Played Important Roles in California State Park History**

With the celebration of Women's History Month in March comes the recognition of the important roles women played in the history of California State Parks. The dedication and vision of many women were vital in the creation of one of the most magnificent parks systems in the world.

Women from all ethnic backgrounds continue to be an integral part of California State Parks history.

Many of the state parks contain important Native American heritage resources. These resources not only illuminate the past but are also important to the living culture of today's Native Americans. Native American women play an important role in this heritage preservation through participation in living history programs, such as Native American arts and crafts.

Women played major roles in establishing the town of Allensworth, now Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park, the only California town to be founded, financed and governed by African Americans. The park is located in TULARE COUNTY, north of Bakersfield, seven miles west of the town of Earlimart. More than 200 settlers came to Allensworth to establish a viable town in the San Joaquin Valley.

Josephine Leavell Allensworth, wife of Colonel Allensworth, was instrumental in organizing the Women's Improvement Club, which established a playground for children in the town. She also served as president of the school board. When the town's new school was built, she acquired the old school house,

remodeled it, and solicited the Turlare County Rural Free Circulating Library to furnish it with books. The building became the Mary Dickinson Memorial Library for the town of Allensworth.

Mary Jane Bickers was a woman of strong entrepreneurial spirit. She owned the first store in Allensworth. Included in the store supplies was MJB coffee, which caused of the residents to call MJB coffee "Mary Jane Bickers coffee." Mary Jane Bickers was the first postmistress of the town when the post office was established on September 25, 1909. She operated the post office in her store and many families went to the store almost daily to check on the mail.

The phone number for Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park is (805) 849-3433.

Asian American women provide historical research and presentations in parks, such as Weaverville Joss House, located in TRINITY COUNTY in the town of Weaverville, about fifty miles west of Redding. "The Temple of the Forest Beneath the Clouds" is the oldest continuously used Chinese temple in California. This Taoist temple is still a place of worship and gives a fascinating look into the roles played by Chinese immigrants in California history.

Since the Gold Rush, worshippers have visited the temple and prayed to the eight deities inside. Two of the deities are goddesses: Kuan Yin is the goddess of mercy. She is believed to be extremely patient and is depicted in many different forms: carrying a baby, book, and vase. Women have been known to pray to Kuan Yin for help in conceiving a baby. Leon Mar is the empress of

heaven. Known as the goddess of sailors, she protects people for safe journeys over the seas.

For more information, call the park at (530) 623-5284.

China Camp State Park, in MARIN COUNTY four miles east of San Rafael on the shore of San Pablo Bay, is the site of a Chinese shrimp-fishing village which thrived there since the 1880s. Nearly 500 people, originally from Canton, China, lived in the village. Over 90% of the shrimp they netted were dried and shipped to China or Chinese communities throughout the U.S. The first immigrants were men. Their wives came over later.

With the rise in the popularity of leisure time activities, the Quan family started a business for sports fishing enthusiasts. Widowed sisters-in-law Alice and Grace Quan kept the business running from the 1920s through the 1950s. Their children run the business today.

The park has a house museum describing the early Chinese settlement. For more information, call the park at (415) 456-0766.


Noted architect Julia Morgan designed two state parks - the world-famous Hearst Castle (or Hearst San Simeon State Historical Monument) and the beautiful Asilomar Conference Grounds. She was the first woman to graduate from the University of California's School of Engineering in 1894. The Hearst estate consists of 165 rooms and 127 acres of gardens, terraces and walkways. It took 28 years to complete. The Asilomar Conferences Grounds include 11 buildings designated as National Historical Landmarks. Located near rolling dunes and a rocky shoreline, the center provides beautiful facilities for meetings

and overnight lodging. During her career, Julia Morgan designed more than 800 buildings, including San Francisco's Fairmont Hotel. Hearst Castle is located in SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY, halfway between San Francisco and Los Angeles on Highway One. For tour information, call (800) 444-4445. Asilomar Conference Grounds, located in MONTEREY COUNTY, is on the Monterey Peninsula in Pacific Grove. For conference facilities information, call (831) 372-8016

In 1849, an African American woman named Nancy Gooch was brought to California as a slave. Slavery was not tolerated in California, and she was eventually given her freedom. Through hard work and frugal living, she bought the freedom of her son, Andrew Monroe, who brought his family to Coloma. In time, the Monroes prospered and gained respect in the community. As gold mining activities began to decline, the Monroes acquired land and planted fruit trees and other crops. When James Marshall died in 1885, Andrew Monroe dug his grave on the site now graced by the Marshall Monument. In the 1940s their land holdings, which included the original site of Sutter's mill and the gold discovery site, were acquired by the State of California. Many of the Monroe family, including Nancy Gooch, are buried in the Pioneer Cemetery at Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park in Coloma in EL DORADO COUNTY, 18 miles south of Auburn and eight miles north of Placerville on Highway 49. For more information, call the park at (530) 622-3470.

Harriet "Petey" Weaver was the first female California State Parks Ranger. She began her career in 1929 and served state parks and the visiting public for the next 20 years. She was not only the first woman ranger during this time; she

was the only woman ranger. Her love of nature, park visitors, coworkers, and the parks themselves represent the ideals of all state park employees. She first came to Big Basin Redwoods State Park, home to stately redwood groves, after her junior year at U.C.L.A. She recalled, "As I drove through the entrance of the park and beheld the sign which read 'TO BE PRESERVED IN A STATE OF NATURE' I knew my life was to be profoundly changed forever. I knew I had to make this my life."

Big Basin Redwoods State Park is the oldest State Park in California. The park has miles of trails, which serve hikers and equestrians, and link Big Basin to Castle Rock State Park and the eastern reaches of the Santa Cruz range. The park has a surprising number of waterfalls, a wide variety of environments, and many animals and birds. The park is a WATCHABLE WILDLIFE SITE. 

Located in SANTA CRUZ/SAN MATEO COUNTIES, the park is 20 miles north of Santa Cruz via Highways 9 and 236. For more information, call the park at (831) 338-8860.

A number of state parks have been named for women and their families:

Bale Gristmill State Historic Park (in NAPA COUNTY, three miles north of St. Helena) is the site of a gristmill owned by Dr. Edward Turner Bale and his wife Carolina Soberanes Bale. The water-powered mill was built in 1846. It was once the center of social activity as Napa Valley settlers gathered to have their corn and wheat ground into meal or flour. Dr. Bale received the property in a land grant from the Mexican government and lived near the site with his wife until his death in 1849. After her husband's death, Mrs. Bale operated the mill, which

remained in use until the early 1900s. The mill and its 36-foot water wheel are protected as a state historic landmark and have been partially restored. Call the park at (707) 942-4575 or 963-2236.

Two state parks are named after Francisca Maria Felipa Benicia Carrillo de Vallejo, wife of General Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, former Mexican commander of the San Francisco presidio, California State Senator and mayor of Sonoma. Benicia Capitol State Historic Park is located at 115 West G Street in Benicia, not far from Vallejo. Call (707) 745-3385 for more information. Benicia State Recreation Area is 1.5 miles west of the outskirts of Benicia on I-780. Call (707) 648-1911 for more information. Both parks are in SOLANO COUNTY.

General Vallejo sold the land where the city of Benicia is today on the condition that it would be named after his wife. The town of Francisca was established in 1848. However, because of possible confusion with the city of San Francisco, the town was renamed Benicia, using one of Mrs. Vallejo's other names. She was so flattered that the town was named for her that she began using "Benicia" as her first name.

Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park (in BUTTE COUNTY, at 525 The Esplanade in Chico) was the home of Annie Bidwell and her husband, pioneer General John Bidwell. The Bidwell wealth came from the California gold fields. General Bidwell was a social activist, congressman and a leading grower. The Mansion was the headquarters of Rancho Chico, once the most famous farm in the state. It is a three-story 26-room brick house built in the 1860s. The design is

in the style of an Italian villa. The park features guided tours. For more information, call (530) 895-6144.

Donner Memorial State Park was named in honor of the Donner Party, which included Tamesen Donner and Eliza Donner. The park is located on Donner Lake in the Sierra-Nevada mountain range in NEVADA and PLACER counties. The park contains the Emigrant Trail Museum, with exhibits recounting the tragic story of the ill-fated Donner Party, which was trapped in the area during the severe winter of 1846-47. The museum also features displays on the region's history and natural environment. For more information, call the park at (530) 582-7892 or 525-7232.

Fatjo Ranch was the home of Paula Marie Fatjo, a descendent of the Pacheco family, whose land holdings totaled nearly 150,000 acres in the middle of the 19th century. The Pacheco family distinguished themselves by successfully keeping title to their land through five generations. Pacheco State Park, which contains the ranch, came into existence through the dream of Ms. Fatjo, who wished her ranch, El Rancho San Luis Gonzaga, to be kept intact for the enjoyment of people who shared her love of horses and the beauty of the unspoiled land itself. The park is located in MERCED COUNTY along the scenic Pacheco Pass, 24 miles west of Los Banos and 20 miles east of Gilroy on Dinosaur Point Road off of Highway 152. For more information, call the park at (559) 826-6283.

The Forest of Nisene Marks State Park offers 10,000 acres of rugged semi-wilderness, rising from sea level to steep coastal mountains of more than

2,600 feet. Nisene Marks was a Danish immigrant who settled in the Salinas Valley. She ran a chicken ranch, and provided chicken feed to ranchers in the area. Her husband was a schoolteacher. In 1963, her two sons and daughter donated the land to the state in her name because of her love of nature. The park is in SANTA CRUZ COUNTY, four miles north of Aptos on Aptos Creek Road. For more information, call the park at (831) 429-2850 or 761-3487.

Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park was named for Julia Pfeiffer Burns, the daughter of a Big Sur pioneer family. When Lathrop and Helen Hopper Brown began to acquire their Big Sur acreage in 1924, Mrs. Brown became acquainted with Julia Pfeiffer Burns. In 1962, Mrs. Brown gave the ranch to the state for use as a state park dedicated to the memory of Julia Pfeiffer Burns. The park, stretching from the Big Sur coastline into the nearby 3,000-foot ridges, is in MONTEREY COUNTY, 37 miles south of Carmel on Highway One, 12 miles south of Pfeiffer Big Sur. For more information, call the park at (831) 667-2315.

Emma Wood State Beach is located in VENTURA COUNTY, two miles west of the city of Ventura. Emma Wood was the daughter of a wealthy landowner. Her family donated the land in her name to the state in the 1950s. Moderate ocean temperatures at Emma Wood State Beach make the area a great place for swimming, surfing and fishing. Catches include perch, bass, cabezon and corbina. A freshwater marsh at the southwest end of the beach attracts raccoons, songbirds and red-tailed hawks. The beach also features the crumbling ruins of a World War II coastal artillery site. For more information, call the beach at (805) 654-4610 or 899-1400.



El Presidio de Santa Barbara State Historic Park is the site of the oldest building in Santa Barbara and the second oldest in California. Santa Barbara was named for Saint Barbara. There is a legend that a lightning bolt struck down her persecutor, so she became known as the patron saint of times of danger from thunderstorms, lightning, fires, and sudden death. Over the years, cannons and artillerymen have claimed her as their patron saint.

Visitors to El Presidio can step back and view this historic site surrounded by modern buildings. El Cuartel, the oldest existing building in Santa Barbara, is all that remains of the last of four Royal Presidios (Spanish military outposts) built in Alta California. The presidio in Santa Barbara was built in 1782. It served as the military and government headquarters for the lands between Los Angeles and San Luis Obispo until 1846. The park, in SANTA BARBARA COUNTY, is located at 210 East Cañon Perdido, between Anacapa and Santa Barbara Streets in downtown Santa Barbara. For more information, call the park at (805) 965-0093.

Santa Susana Pass State Historic Park is located in LOS ANGELES COUNTY, where the Simi Hills meet the Santa Susana Mountains. The park offers panoramic views of the rugged natural landscape as a striking contrast to the developed communities nearby. Visitors can enjoy its scenic open space with a set of trails networking through the property.

According to tradition, Santa Susana was a young Christian woman who was martyred for refusing to worship Rome's pagan gods.

The best access to the park is via Chatsworth Park South (Los Angeles City Community Park). Take the 118 Freeway to the Topanga Canyon Boulevard

exit. Proceed south on Topanga Boulevard approximately one mile. Turn right (west) on Devonshire, proceed half a mile, and enter Chatsworth Park South, where there is free parking. The hills surrounding the community park are the parklands for Santa Susana State Historic Park, which is a day-use area. For more information call (818) 880-0350 or (310) 455-2465, the phone number for Topanga State Park. Staff can provide information about Santa Susana State Historic Park.

Santa Monica State Beach is located in LOS ANGELES COUNTY along the Pacific Coast Highway in Santa Monica. The beach, two miles long, has a picnic area, shops and pier. Activities include volleyball, basketball and a running strip along the beach.


Saint Monica is the patroness of married women and is the mother of St. Augustine of Hippo.

For more information, call the beach at (818) 880-0350.

Tule Elk State Reserve protects a herd of tule elk, once in danger of extinction. Located in KERN COUNTY, the reserve is north of Gorman, south of Buttonwillow, west of I-5 via Stockdale Highway.

In the 1880s, vast herds of tule elk were greatly reduced in number by hunting and loss of habitat. Cattleman Henry Miller began a 50-year effort to save them in 1874. At that time, only 28 elk remained. In 1932, the herd was given permanent protection in a 950-acre property, now known as Tule Elk State Reserve. Elk from the reserve have been successfully transplanted to other areas in California where free-roaming herds of tule elk can be found today.

Beula Edmiston, a schoolteacher and volunteer conservationist, was instrumental in getting state and federal legislation to protect the elk. Thanks to her efforts, the animals thrive and prosper not only in the reserve, but in other parks of the state as well.

The elk are most active from late summer through early autumn. The reserve is a WATCHABLE WILDLIFE SITE. 

For more information, call the park at (805) 765-5004 or (559) 822-2332

Many First Ladies of California made the Governor's Mansion State Historic Park home. Located at 16<sup>th</sup> and H streets in downtown Sacramento (SACRAMENTO COUNTY), the mansion became the official residence for California's governors in 1903 and was used by all subsequent governors until 1967. Guided tours are available. For more information, call the park at (916) 323-3047.

Countless women have contributed to California State Park history - as pioneers and as state park employees. Their dedication and vision will always be a part of one of the finest state park systems in the world.

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