Guide to the Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park Photographic Collection

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Collection number: Consult repository

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Descriptive Summary
Title: Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park Photographic Collection
Dates: 1852-2014
Collection number: Consult repository
Creator: California State Parks
Collector: California State Parks
Collection Size: 1,148 images
Repository: Photographic Archives.
California State Parks
McClellan, CA 92262
Abstract: The Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park Photographic Collection contains 1,148 images and dates from 1852 through 2014. Images depict the property as an African-American colony and later, as a state park.
Physical location: For current information on the physical location of these materials, please consult the Guide to the California State Parks Photographic Archives, available online.
Languages: Languages represented in the collection: English
Access
Collection is open for research by appointment.
Publication Rights
Property rights reside with the repository. Copyrights are retained by the creators of the records. For permission to reproduce or to publish, please contact the Head Curator of the California State Parks Photographic Archives.
Preferred Citation
[Identification of item including photographer and date when available], Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park Photographic Collection, [Catalog number], California State Parks Photographic Archives, McClellan, California
Acquisition Information
Images donated by private parties, generated by California State Parks, and transferred from Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park at various times.
Accruals
Further accruals are expected.
Park History
Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park contains roughly 240 acres of historical resources. Located in Tulare County in the lower San Joaquin Valley, the park is bordered to the east by the Santa Fe Railway and is roughly 11 miles east of the census-designated place of Earlimart. The park is accessible by car via California State Highway 43.
Although the lower San Joaquin Valley was home to the Yokuts tribe for thousands of years, the land comprising the present-day park has thus far produced no archaeological evidence of their tenure there. This location is thought to have
been largely uninhabited prior to the completion of the San Francisco and San Joaquin Valley Railroad in 1898, a stretch of rail purchased by the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad Company that same year. But with the introduction of the railroad to the lower San Joaquin Valley, agricultural settlements soon sprang up alongside the lines. One notable population center was the African-American colony of Allensworth.

In 1908, former slave, retired army chaplain, and famed orator, Lieutenant Colonel Allen Allensworth, together with Professor William A. Payne, retired miner John W. Palmer, African Methodist Episcopal Church Minister Dr. William H. Peck, and real-estate specialist Harvey Mitchell founded the California Colony and Home Promoting Association. Admirers and contemporaries of Booker T. Washington, Allensworth and his colleagues sought to acquire land and create a self-sustaining black colony away from the oppressive horrors and socioeconomic stagnation of white supremacy and racial segregation. Purchasing 3,000 acres of land from the Pacific Farming Company at a Santa Fe Railway whistle-stop called Solita, the association established Allensworth: the first, last, and only town in California founded, financed, and governed by African Americans.

News of Allensworth quickly spread throughout the country via both black and white newspapers and word of mouth. Businesses soon sprang up throughout the town. Mary Jane Bickers established a grocery store, cafe, and post office in 1909, the same year that the town became a postal district. The following year, the Allensworth Hotel opened, followed soon after by the Hindsman General Store in 1911 and the Carter Livery Stable, Milner's Barber Shop, Scott-Grosse Drugstore, and Johnson's Bakery in 1913. By 1912, the Allensworth School District was created, the Allensworth Elementary School building was constructed, and a branch of the Tulare County Free Library was dedicated the following year. Besides profiting as a railway depot, the town's economy was driven by agriculture, with commercial farmers producing grain, alfalfa, and dairy on the surrounding acreage. Although residents' lives were a constant struggle with the arid, highly alkaline landscape, the town thrived for a brief period.

Allensworth soon suffered numerous setbacks which contributed to its ultimate decline. First, the Pacific Farming Company failed to fulfill its contractual obligations to provide water system improvements at pace with the town's population growth. Second, the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad Company constructed a spur to the nearby town of Alpaugh in the summer of 1914, diverting neighboring farmers' business away from the Allensworth depot. And third, Colonel Allensworth himself died that year from injuries sustained from a motorcycle accident in Monrovia, California, a loss that severely demoralized the community. Faced with their leader's death, drying wells, and a failing economy, most of the town's 200 residents moved away, leaving the dream of Allensworth to deteriorate with its buildings.

But in 1968, Allensworth resident and California State Parks draftsman Cornelius E. Pope sparked interest in the historic town once more. Inspired to sustain the momentum of the Civil Rights Movement in the wake of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination that year, Pope identified the glaring deficit of African-American sites within California's state park system and offered Allensworth as an ideal historic district to fill that absence. In 1971, the legislature requested the Allensworth Feasibility Study, which confirmed Pope's earlier findings. The following year, Allensworth was listed on the National Register of Historic Places, acquired by California State Parks the year after that, and classified a state historic park in 1974.

California State Parks, coordinating with the Friends of Allensworth, preserves and interprets vital historical resources at Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park. Since acquiring the property, California State Parks employees and volunteers have restored, preserved, and reconstructed numerous historic buildings, including the Colonel Allensworth Home, the Allensworth Elementary School, the Tulare County Free Library, the First Baptist Church, the Hindsman General Store, and the Santa Fe Railroad Depot, with even more restoration projects planned for the future. The park also includes 115 acres of land set aside for agricultural interpretation and 50 acres reserved for support services. The park hosts numerous regular events, including the Colonel Allensworth Birthday Celebration, the Old Time Jubilee, Juneteenth, and the Annual Rededication Event. The park is open Thursdays through Sundays and for special events, and it provides 15 campsites, which accommodate both RVs and tents.

Scope and Content of Collection


The collection mainly documents the buildings and structures contained within the historic park. Images depict both historic and contemporary interior and exterior views of pre- and post-restoration buildings and structures, including the Colonel Allensworth Home, the Allensworth Elementary School, the Bonty Store, the Allensworth Hotel, the Tulare County Free Library, the Singleton General Store, the Hindsman House, the Johnson Bakery, the Scott-Grosse Drugstore, and the First Baptist Church. Other features include grain warehouses, artesian wells, chicken coops, turkey pens, barns, agricultural...
equipment, pig corrals, and historic boxcars. Interior views of the restored Allensworth home, the Allensworth Elementary School, and the Tulare County Free Library additionally document the house museums’ period furnishings.

The collection also includes several historic group and individual portraits of Allensworth residents. Individuals include: Colonel Allen Allensworth and his wife, Josephine Leavell Allensworth; local farmers and entrepreneurs Wallace, Ray, Bill, and Marjorie Towns, Mayme Panky, Walter and Effie Wells, Mary Jane Bickers, and Horace Wheaton; and local luminaries Oscar O. Overr, first African-American justice of the peace in California, and Alwortha Hall, the first person born in Allensworth.

The collection also documents several events over the course of the park’s history. Events include: the construction of the Visitor Center in the 1970s; the 1976 Dedication ceremony with interpretive displays and parade floats; the 1984 Black American Week exhibit dedication, presided over by Governor George Deukmejian and held at the State Capitol; the 1995 Rededication Ceremony with living history events, hayrides, a crafts fair, and line dancing; the First Baptist Church groundbreaking ceremony in 1999; the 2000 Dedication ceremony for the completed church- and library-restoration projects, featuring then-California State Senators Steve Peace and Jim Costa, then-California State Parks Director Rusty Areias, then-Superintendent Don Lakatos, and Reverend Dr. Henry Mitchell; and the 2008 Allensworth Centennial with park rangers, volunteers, “Buffalo Soldier” reenactors, the annual 5K Race, the presentation of the California State Legislature’s commemorative Black Caucus Resolution, and former Allensworth resident and author Alice Royal.

The collection also includes various historic documents. These items include: maps of Tulare County, Allensworth, and the platted town site; Pacific Farming Company advertisements for the Allensworth colony; articles of incorporation for the California Colony and Home Promoting Association, the Pacific Farming Company, and the Allensworth City Water Company; and illustrations of African Americans from the Reconstruction-era South.

Indexing Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog:

- Allensworth (Calif.)
- Allensworth, Allen, 1842-1914
- Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway Company
- California. Department of Parks and Recreation
- Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park (Calif.)
- Cultural resources
- National Register of Historic Places
- San Joaquin Valley (Calif.)
- Tulare County (Calif.)

Related Material at California State Parks

- Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park Collection

Related Material at Other Repositories

- Allensworth Materials, Tulare County Library: Annie R. Mitchell History Room
- Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway Collection, California State Railroad Museum Library
- Hackett Family Papers, Oakland Public Library: African American Museum and Library at Oakland
- Royal E. Towns Papers, Oakland Public Library: African American Museum and Library at Oakland

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