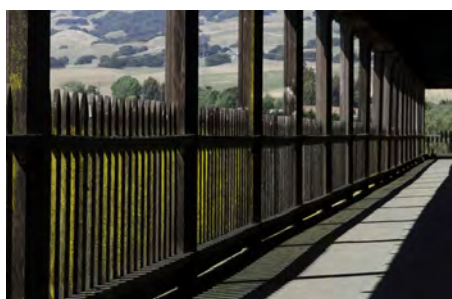


SONOMA and PETALUMA ADOBE STATE HISTORIC PARKS



Docent and SPParks GAZETTE Summer 2025



SPParks UPDATE

SPParks has been active for the last few months, what with the 1st Thursdays' Music in the Mission Concerts and 3rd Thursdays' Lectures. I hope you have managed to catch one of the shows or talks that Jerome has gathered.

We had a very successful 2nd annual Toscano Tea last month, thanks to all the Docents and members who attended. A delightful unexpected surprise was Kay and Al Adams, along with Dave Viviani, who talked about Kay's time at the Toscano Hotel and Kitchen. She lived at the Hotel and worked in the Dining Room as a teenager! [Editor's note: see photos on page 8]

SPParks is partnering with the Sonoma Valley Visitors Bureau for the 4th of July Parade in Sonoma. The theme for the parade is "Road Trip, along route 66", while our float's theme is "Destination Sonoma!" Plans are evolving. If you are interested in walking with us, let me know – prepare your best tourist outfit and your rolling luggage!

Are you aware that Sonoma Valley Visitors Bureau is planning to relocate into the Toscano Hotel first floor sometime this year? We will keep you posted on the upcoming changes for the shared space.

Thank you for supporting our State Historic Parks.

Volunteers are the hands that make things happen!

Anne Cox, Board President

DOCENT ORGANIZATION UPDATE

June's quarterly meeting of the Docent Organization brought lots of historical information and welcome news. The information was in the form of Ed Purkey's presentation of his research on the Bear Flag Revolt. Since the meeting happened to be on the anniversary of the beginning of the "California Republic", June 14th, his presentation was timely. See a summary of Ed's research on page 4.

The welcome news is that **John Braschi** has stepped up to serve as co-chair of the Docent Organization. Welcome, and thank you for volunteering.



In John's own words:

I grew up in the Bay Area and have been a long-term resident of Sonoma County. Having lived in New York City and Hawaii, I was surrounded by local history. The Bay Area and especially Sonoma County have a unique and fun history to learn. I became a docent to be able to share my lifelong love for history and curiosity about local history. I was a history major and economics major and so it is wonderful to use some of that history background. I come from a family of teachers and so the docent work is a natural extension of growing up in an educational environment. I really enjoy swapping stories with the other docents and the continuous learning involved.

Professor Jim's History Mystery Quiz

1. Who was the only man to serve three consecutive terms as governor of California?
2. Prior to May 1, 1950, what was the title of San Francisco's chief executive officer?
3. What town located in the San Joaquin Valley was a refuge for Black Californians?
4. What is the California state insect?

Answers on page 6

State Parks NEWS

Field Trip to Sonoma Developmental Center

On Wednesday afternoon, April 16th, 2025, State Parks staff locked up museum doors and headed off on a field trip to the historic Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC). They were joined by a sizable group of SPParks members and volunteers on the front lawn of the old administrative Main Building. Leading the afternoon's tour was Tracy Salcedo of Sonoma Mountain Preservation and Steve Lee of the Sonoma Ecology Center.

The SDC has a long and controversial legacy in the Sonoma Valley. Established in 1883 by Frances H. Bentley and Julia M. Judah, the center was formerly named the California Home for the Care and Training of Feeble-Minded Children. It moved to its current Eldridge location in 1891, where it continued to house residents of all ages with developmental disabilities until its closure in 2018. The center's history, including the practice of involuntary sterilization and human experimentation, remains a challenge to interpret to the public. In January of 2024, about 750 acres of the center's expansive undeveloped lands, situated between Jack London State Historic Park and Sonoma County Regional Park, were transferred to California State Parks to form the Open Space. The remaining 180 acres of the developed campus are now slated to be redeveloped, a topic that has sparked much debate within the community.

Many of the tour participants had little prior knowledge of the full history of SDC, but they do remember a time when the center was bustling with employees. Some even remember the last of the residents to leave after the closure. Today, many of the buildings of SDC sit in disrepair. There is a kind of eerie feeling in the air. A road winds between buildings and leads up to a popular hiking trail into the hills behind. Overgrowth has consumed the abandoned structures that were once utilized as housing units and medical facilities. Nature has moved back in. The guides explained the importance of the land's wildlife corridor which encourages local biodiversity and helps ecosystems to thrive.



(photo by Dee Katson)



(photo by Dee Katson)

A highlight for many was a visit to the on-site warehouse which now houses an array of artifacts, from medical apparatuses and a large collection of books, to benches from a deconstructed carousel that once operated on the property. (Parks staff is hoping for the carousel to one day be restored!) The group also learned that nearby Graham Creek demarcates the historic property line of Mariano Vallejo's Petaluma rancho, drawing an important connection between SDC and the history of early Sonoma.

The tour ended on a hopeful note, and the guides emphasized the value of community and organization involvement. While plans for demolition, redevelopment, and future land use are still in progress, what remains clear is the need to responsibly memorialize the history of SDC, its treatment of individuals with disabilities, and the enduring impacts on the local community.

A huge thank you to Tracy and Steve for being such wonderful tour guides and for answering our many questions. Their passion for the SDC property is admirable, and we are all looking forward to the future of SDC and the Open Space partnership with State Parks. We'd also like to thank Ranger Cecilia Rejas and former State Archaeologist Breck Parkman who first proposed this educational tour.

Lilliana Zamora,
Senior Park Aide (Interpretive)
and Kathy Wolcott, Senior Park Aid

Hollywood on the Plaza?

Gambling, drinking, smoking and revenge for love gone wrong hasn't happened in the historic Toscano Hotel in quite some time, but took place in May as part of a video shoot for a local singer. Built in 1852 as a general store and lending library, the Toscano Hotel was one of the first non-adobe buildings in Sonoma. The video shoot is the second arranged by Napa-based mariachi singer Jose Manzo, who has plans to do one more at Petaluma Adobe State Historic Park. The hotel's next incarnation is slated to be the home of the Sonoma Valley Visitors Bureau later this summer.

*Donna Joy Vigil,
Senior Park Aide/Special Event Coordinator*



(photos by Donna Joy Vigil)

Sonoma SHP Begins Staff Led Tours

Staff at Sonoma SHP will be offering tours of the Mission, Barracks, Toscano Hotel, and Blue Wing Inn for \$10 per person on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from 11 am to 1 pm. The paid private tours can be searched for and registered for, on the Reserve California website. There will still be docent led tours of each venue as always, and SPParks will continue to offer private group tours for larger groups for \$75 per group.

The Casa Grande parking lot will be impacted again this summer because of Transcendence Theatre on the following dates:

Aug. 7-10, Aug. 14-17, Sept. 4-7, and Sept. 11-14.

Thanks and enjoy your summer.

Rob Pickett, Supervising Ranger

Save the Date:
43rd Annual
California Missions and Presidios Conference
presented by
California Missions Foundation
Mission Dolores, San Francisco, CA
April 17-19, 2026

Suzanne Berube Awarded Star Volunteer

The Sonoma Valley Star Awards, sponsored by the Catalyst Fund, honor "Star Volunteers" of nonprofits who serve Sonoma Valley. SPParks is proud to honor **Suzanne Berube**, SPParks Director, Docent, and Star Award winner. Suzanne can be found at park events encouraging membership, or at a craft table, often in period clothing. She knows her California history forward and backward and continues to read and study the nuances of culture in our history. In 2024 she met and led our Spring and Fall Backroads Bike Tours, in addition to conducting many other special group tours. Thank you, Suzanne!



(photo by Daniel Perales)

The Bear Flag Revolt of 1846

by Edward Purkey, Docent

In the three years before the Mexican American War (before the Gold Rush) there was a dramatic surge of over 2,000 American settlers into northern California. Most estimate the contemporary *Californio* population at approx. 9,000, mostly in southern California. This made for a sudden demographic pressure upon the long-time, Spanish speaking residents here in Alta California's Northern Frontier. Something had to give... And something did ...the Bear Flag Revolt.

During this same period, the American "Great Pathfinder," John C. Fremont was moving up, down, and around the area. In doing so, he succeeded in making a serious nuisance of himself to the *Californio* officials (intentionally). While the details of his orders are unknown, Fremont returned to the Sacramento area to incite the local Americans to revolt against Mexican authorities. He seized on the pervasive rumor that was circulating, that General José Castro was gathering a military force to evict all non-Mexican citizens from the central valley area where many Americans had settled.

The Americans were painfully aware that as non-citizens, Mexico would never give them title to the land on which they lived and worked. So it was not too hard for Fremont to channel these fears into an informal militia and motivate them to attack the nearest Mexican army post, the presidio at Sonoma. However, as an American army officer, Fremont himself could not personally lead them. He incited, encouraged, made suggestions to them, but he appointed one of them, **Ezekiel Merritt** ("Stuttering Zeke") to be their leader. Other members of the group included **William B. Ide**, a schoolteacher from Massachusetts and a member of the Latter-Day Saints, whose sobriety was a help to the Bear Flaggers the day of their invasion of Sonoma. Also, there was **Henry L. Ford**, who had deserted the U.S. Army in Pennsylvania and had reinvented himself in California. **Robert Semple**, a.k.a. "Long Bob," was described as "6-1/2 ft. tall and 1-1/2 ft. wide." **William Todd** of Kentucky was the first cousin (not nephew) of Mary Todd Lincoln. Todd is credited for designing the original Bear Flag.

The Bear Flaggers, while undisciplined had a clear goal: To set up a "Republic of California," like what had happened 10 years prior in Texas. By forming (an Anglo) California Republic, they could easily settle their land ownership. It was dawn on June 14, 1846 when nearly three dozen Americans rode into Sonoma, rushing to the Barracks to do battle with the Mexican soldiers. They were armed and ready for a fight. (Dare I say, "They were loaded for bear?") In a great anticlimax, instead of combating Mexican soldiers, "they only found two old men and a dog." (Quoting a Barracks docent of yesteryear.) Years prior, General Vallejo had disbanded his resident army, most likely out of financial concerns.

Frustrated, the "Bears" went next door to the Casa Grandé, Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo's home, pounding on the door.

"Stuttering Zeke" Merritt informed Vallejo that they were there to form their own independent government and were placing him under arrest. Then in what some describe as typical *Californio comportamiento*, Vallejo invited their leaders to come inside to discuss everything over drinks.

Merritt, Semple, and Bill Knight accepted his invitation to enter. Once inside Vallejo served wine, brandy, and food. As the discussions inside went on for hours, outside the "Bears" grew increasingly restless. Finally, Ide went inside to check on what was happening.

The sober Bill Ide brought the libations to a halt and the "Bears" returned outside to report. When an agreed surrender was read aloud, the mood of the group got ugly. They had come here to fight and defeat the Mexicans. Some talked of ransacking the Casa Grandé, others of looting the whole town, a few even wanted to hang Vallejo. But Semple and Ide dampened those ideas.



(Continued on page 5)

(Bear Flag Revolt - continued from page 4)

The group also disagreed about what to do with General Vallejo. Some wanted to simply confine him to his home. Others insisted on imprisoning him. Finally, it was decided that Merritt and Semple would take him to Fremont's camp on the Sacramento River where his fate would be decided. The group insisted that Mariano G. Vallejo, his brother Salvadore, Jacob Leese (who served as interpreter), and Victor Prudon (Vallejo's secretary) all be taken as prisoners. When the group arrived at Fremont's camp, the captives' hopes of cordiality from the American officer were dashed. To the stunned *Californios*, Fremont disavowed any responsibility of the Bear Flag incident.

'Long Bob' Semple managed to calm the situation, suggesting they be taken to John Sutter in Sacramento as captives. Upon their arrival, Sutter put all four into an unfurnished bare room, where they slept on the floor without mattresses and blankets. Vallejo was quite upset with Sutter's treatment, for he (Vallejo) had for years advocated for him to the *Californio* officials.

They remained imprisoned for the next eight weeks. When they were finally released on August 8, his health was broken, he had lost significant weight and had contracted malaria.

Meanwhile the Bear Flaggers remaining in Sonoma set about making a flag to represent their new California Republic. Reportedly, as Todd was drawing the grizzly bear, his fellow "Bears" shouted: "Bill! It looks like a hog!" They raised it victoriously on a flagpole in the Sonoma Plaza in front of the Barracks on June 15, 1846.

On June 18, Henry L. Ford sent Thomas Cowie and George Fowler north to the Fitch Rancho on the Russian

River to get a keg of fresh gunpowder. Ignoring Ford's counsel, they traveled openly on the main roads. The *Californio* 'outlaw' Bernardo Garcia, a.k.a. "Three-Fingered Jack", and his gang captured them and cruelly put the pair to death, dismembering their bodies.

During this time, various Bear Flaggers were dispatched to the surrounding countryside to spread the news of the Revolt. On the 21st, Ford sent Bill Todd to Bodega. On the way, a group of *Californios* captured Todd. On the 23rd, Ford took a party of "Bears" to recover Todd.

Approaching a ranch house at Olompali, Ford's men realized they had found their enemy. They quickly attacked. However, unbeknownst to the attackers, the *Californios* recently had been joined by more men for a total of over 50! As a host of *Californios* poured out of the cabin and the far trees, the surprised "Bears" prudently retreated into a near stand of trees. The charging *Californios* also fell back out of range. The firing slowly died down as the *Californios* retreated to San Raphael. Ford's men did not pursue them, and the "Battle of Olompali" was over. One *Californio* died and another seriously wounded. The wounded man received treatment from the medics aboard the USS Portsmouth off Sausalito and survived. There were no casualties among the Bear Flaggers. Americans had a victory when they found an unhurt Bill Todd inside the cabin.

Over time, as more Americans arrived in Sonoma, the original *Californio* residents were treated with increasing animosity. Locals reported that the originally promised "No Looting" order grew meaningless as their possessions and even some of their lands were "requisitioned." The given promises of later repayment proved empty.

John Fremont returned to take charge in Sonoma of all the arriving Americans. Seeing the need to organize the diverse elements into a military force, he formed them into a California Battalion under his command (naturally). The battalion went on to serve in the continued conflict with Mexico under differing commanders, but always under a Bear Flag banner/guidon.

Finally, on July 9, 1846, US Navy Lieut. Joseph Warren Revere (grandson of Paul Revere) arrived in Sonoma. Lt. Revere raised the Stars and Stripes.

And so ended the Bear Flag Revolt and ...after only 25 days... the California Republic.



UPCOMING EVENTS

LECTURES: Third Thursday of the month, 7 pm Mission Chapel. \$10 general public, \$5 SPParks members, Docents and Park staff free.

- July-August: No lectures - enjoy the summer!
- September 18: **Bob Kittle** - Early Spanish Expeditions to California
- October 16: **Stephen D. Steiner** - Solomon Schocken and His Hill

MUSIC IN THE MISSION: First Thursday of the month, 7 pm Mission Chapel. \$10 general public, \$5 SPParks members.

- July-August: No concerts in the Mission - enjoy music in the Plaza Tuesdays and Sundays
- September 4: **Wildflower Weed** (folk music)
- October 2: **Ted Kuster** (folk & bluegrass with an international flair)
- November 6: **Michael Belair** (Brazilian Bossa Nova, Samba & Rhythm & Blues)

Nature & Community Fair: Saturday, August 23, 2025, 4:00 pm – 7:30 pm, Casa Grande area

Docent Picnic: Sunday, August 24, 2025

Fandango: at Petaluma Adobe in September, 2025. Date TBD

NEXT DOCENT QUARTERLY MEETING

Saturday, September 13, 2025

10:00 AM

BARRACKS A/V ROOM



Watch for the "Destination Sonoma!" float, presented by SPParks, State Parks and Sonoma Visitors Bureau in the 4th of July Parade, Sonoma Plaza, 10 am

History Mystery Quiz Answers

1. Earl Warren 1942, 1946 & 1950
2. Alcalde
3. Allensworth
4. California dog face butterfly

International Children's Day, Sunday, June 8, 2025

On Sunday, June 8, 2025 Sonoma State Historic Park hosted International Children's Day, in collaboration with La Luz Sonoma Valley. Hundreds of visitors and families enjoyed crafts tables, games, "tattoos", snake wrangling, Minecraft, snacks, and more. This free event wouldn't be possible without our amazing volunteers, staff, and SPParks.

(Photos by Mike Cox and Jazelle Lieske)



Living History Day – Saturday, May 10, 2025

Every year in May (Living History Month) we turn the clock back to the 1840's and experience what would have been happening in the Rancho Era. This year, at the National Historic Landmark built between 1836 and 1846 by General Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, we celebrated Petaluma Adobe Living History Day where visitors met craftsmen, vaqueros, Russian Commanders, and other men and women who lived in Mexican California. We learned how to weave baskets, dip candles, braid rope, lasso with vaqueros and play historical games.

(Photos by Jerry Pozo)



Sheep Shearing, Saturday, April 12, 2025

A spectacular sunny warm day greeted all the sheep, chickens, children, and other visitors to the annual Sheep Shearing Day at the Petaluma Adobe. All 4 sheep from Flat Broke Farm Animal Rescue have recovered from their trauma and are happy to be a few pounds lighter. As always, carding, spinning, and other crafts were demonstrated and enjoyed by all.

(photos by Dee Katson)



Toscano Tea Shines Spotlight on Historic Hotel, Kitchen and Dining Room ***Sunday, May 18, 2025***

A great big THANK YOU to all our wonderful guests who joined SPParks volunteers for a lovely tea-fueled celebration of the Historic Toscano Hotel and Kitchen. On a glorious Spring Sunday afternoon, Sonoma's finest ladies and gentlemen enjoyed sipping and nibbling the delicious tea and treats, while steeped in the history of the beloved community of Italian immigrants who gathered in the Toscano. And both guests and hosts were thrilled by a surprise guest who actually lived in the Toscano Hotel – Kay Adams. Escorted by her husband Al, and friend Dave Viviani, she shared memories of her experiences in the famous hotel as a teenager.

SPParks is also grateful to Lisa Lavagetto of [*The Food Gurus*](#) who, once again, wowed us with her sweet and savory creations. Thanks also to the volunteers who tied it all together: Anne, Sue, Yvonne, Sharon, Suzanne, Jim D., Mike C., Mary, and Dee.

(Photos by Yvonne Bowers and Dee Katson)



LINKS

GAZETTE Editor: Dee Katson:
administrator@sonomaparks.org

Sonoma Petaluma Parks Association (SPParks):
sonomaparks.org

Sonoma State Historic Park
https://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=479

Petaluma Adobe State Historic Park
https://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=474

MEETINGS

SPParks Board meets 2nd Tuesday of the month,
 10 AM

Docent Quarterly Meetings at 10 AM in the Sonoma Barracks A/V room on the 2nd Saturday in March, June and September and on the 1st Saturday in December

Sonoma Petaluma Parks
 P.O. Box 1702
 Sonoma, CA 95476