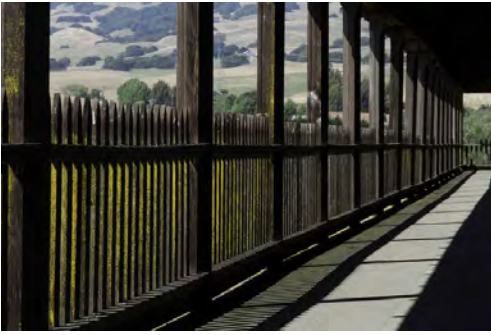


SONOMA and PETALUMA ADOBE STATE HISTORIC PARKS



Docent and SPParks **GAZETTE** Spring 2026



SPParks UPDATE

Hello fellow SPParkers.
Your SPParks membership supports our organization's mission: (yes, that's lower case 'm' not capital 'M'), Interpretation, Preservation and Awareness. Of course behind every successful non-profit is its members - so thank you for that.

Also adding to our bottom-line success is our Barracks Store – managed by the very capable Elizabeth Caban. Elizabeth always brings in interesting and relevant items to the Store. Check it out, or better yet, bring your visitors to check out our Historic Park sites along with the Store!

The saying is “March, in like a lion, out like a lamb” - well, SPParks has a lion of a volunteer, Kit Foster, who was celebrated on March 21st as our SPParks Star Volunteer at the Sonoma Valley Catalyst Fund event at Vintage House. (see page 2)

Also in March - SPParks sponsored the second annual Women's History Crawl, with non-profit, community groups as well other State Parks personnel sharing many less-known women's roles in California's history. Our own Parks Interpretive Senior Parks Aide, April Farnham, shared the story of Maria Amparo Ruiz Burton and her novels. And coming up in April, SPParks is sponsoring the ever popular Sheep Shearing Day on April 11th at the Petaluma Adobe.

That brings us to May! SPParks is hosting our 3rd Annual Toscano Kitchen Tea on May 31st. The wonderful Lisa Lavagetto and pastry chef Jennifer Steinfeld are preparing the food.

(continued on page 2)

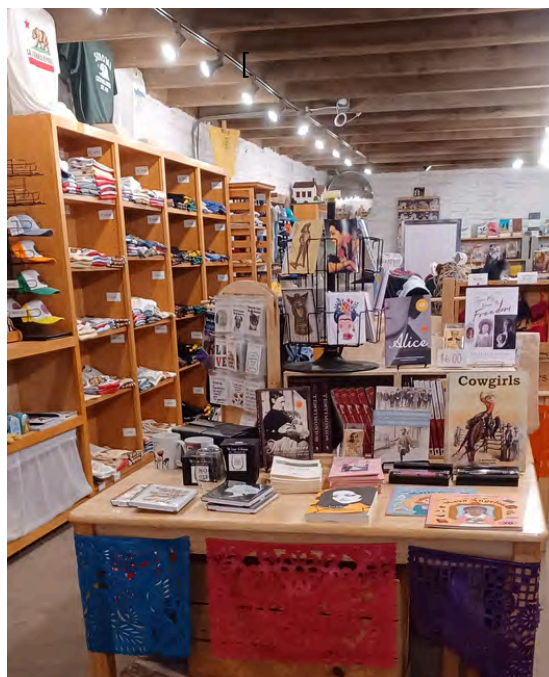
DOCENT UPDATE

Docent recruiting and training program coming soon

The plans for a docent recruiting and training program are still in the early stages, so we don't have many details to share just yet. However, we're working on several ideas, including training and refresher training opportunities, a potential book club, field trips, and new docenting opportunities in the Sonoma and Petaluma State Historic Parks.

We'll also be sending out a survey to current docents in the coming weeks to gauge interest in these ideas and gather feedback. Docents are encouraged to keep an eye on their inboxes. We hope to have it out soon and make some positive improvements this year.

*Tyler Markley, Interpreter I
Jennifer Hanson, Interpreter I*



Barracks Store (photo by Dee Katson)

[Editor's note: If you are not currently an active docent, now is your chance to get involved and share your love of history with Park visitors. Watch for ads and eblasts in the coming months.]

(SPParks Update - continued from page 1)

As you may know, changes are afoot at the Kitchen, so take this time to reacquaint yourselves with the charming Toscano Kitchen and Dining Room.

The Toscano Tea is our main fundraiser, and we are counting on you, our members, to make it successful. Tickets are \$75, and they will be available on April 1st, no fooling, at the Barracks Store. Or you can email me at president@sonomaparks.org and I will bring you the ticket, along with an unadorned hat that you can 'gussy up' to wear to the Tea.

Anne Cox, SPParks Board President



Kit Foster Awarded Volunteer of the Year

The annual Sonoma Valley Star Awards, sponsored by the Catalyst Fund, honors outstanding volunteers who serve Sonoma Valley. In 2026, SPParks is proud to honor Kit Foster, former docent organization chair, expert baker, and tireless volunteer.

Kit has volunteered for many years, lending her willing and skilled hands to interpretative and reenactment events at the Parks.



(photos by Jerry Pozo)



Supervisor Rebecca Hermosilla, Kit Foster, Rep. Mike Thompson

“When I first heard I had been nominated for a STAR AWARD representing SPParks, my reaction was WHAT? ME? REALLY? YOU’RE KIDDING!

When I was told that my nomination had been accepted, I was again surprised.

March 21st at about 3:30pm I was seated with over 50 people receiving awards from over 40 different organizations. All of us waiting for our 15 minutes of fame. I am pleased, honored and surprised to receive this award. Thank you all for your support and congratulations.”

- Kit Foster, Docent, Volunteer

Professor Jim’s History Mystery Quiz

1. What was the name of the grizzly bear depicted on our state flag?
2. What is California’s largest dam?
3. What are the official state colors of the State of California?
4. What was the last Mexican pueblo established in California?

Answers on page 7

Lectures Move to Barracks Theater

Beginning in April, 2026, SPParks will host lectures in the Barracks Theater. After many years in the Mission, it's time for a change. Please join us for our ongoing lecture series in the intimate adobe theater in the Sonoma Barracks.

SPParks Board of Directors



DOCENT LIBRARY NEWS

Inspired by my trip to Montana last fall, I read the non-fiction memoir entitled *"Becoming Little Shell"* by Chris LaTray (not in our library, but available at the Sonoma Public Library), in which LaTray describes his personal journey to find his paternal roots with the Pembina Chippewa tribe of northern Montana. At the March quarterly docent meeting, I featured books old and new concerning Indigenous peoples from our docent library collection: some concern basketry or folktales, some chronicle past tribal history, some are critical political tracts, and some are fiction by native authors.

Here is my **challenge** to all docents (and SPParks members): find and read one book – fiction or non-fiction -- that features Native peoples and share your experience at the September quarterly! Many of the books in our collection are featured on the top, eastern shelf in the Docent Library or find one elsewhere. You can write a book review and submit it to the Gazette, share the book aloud at our September meeting, or simply email the title and author to Lisa so we can compile and share your suggestions in time for Indigenous Peoples Month held in October.

Lisa Tremblay, Docent Librarian

NEXT DOCENT QUARTERLY MEETING

Saturday, June 13, 2026
10:00 AM
BARRACKS THEATER

UPCOMING EVENTS

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

- April 16: **David Rickman** - Outfitting the Expedition: The Dress and Equipment of the Anza Party 1775-1776
- May 21: **Shannon Murray Kuleto and Diane Dillon** - Napa Valley, Bale Mill, and The Bear Flag Revolt of 1846
- June 18: **John Boessenecker** - The Life and Times of Joaquin Murrieta

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

- April 2: **David Aguilar & Peter McCauley**
- May 7: **Jennifer Kloetzel**, cellist on "Mission: Bach" in all 21 Missions
- June 4: **Free Fallin'** with Big O, Oscar Mooneyhan

Sheep Shearing Day: Saturday, April 11th, Petaluma Adobe, 11am - 2pm. Regular park admission fees collected.

California Missions and Presidios Conference: April 17-19, San Francisco Mission Dolores. Learn more at <https://californiamissionsfoundation.org/conference/>

Bats Night: Saturday, May 2nd, Barracks Theater, 5:30pm, Free

Living History Day: Saturday, May 9th, Petaluma Adobe, 10am - 4pm. Regular park admission fees collected.

Tosceno Tea: Sunday, May 31, 2026, 2pm

International Children's Day – Saturday, June 6th, Sonoma Barracks. Presented by Sonoma SHP in collaboration with La Luz Center. Free

California State Parks Week: June 10-14, Sonoma SHP and Petaluma Adobe SHP

Anza 250/America 250: Saturday, June 27th, San Francisco Presidio Anza Expedition 250th anniversary celebration. Learn more at <https://loscalifornianos.org/calendar/>

Travel Bug - aka Enrichment Opportunities

A Short Trip to the Last of the Old Time Mining Camps

Story and photos by Tim Long, Docent

A long time ago a couple of young troublemakers were held at gunpoint by the sheriff and run out of town for good! OK, maybe not so long ago, 53 years. And it was not the sheriff, it was the Bodie State Historic Park Ranger. Yes, it was me and my crazy friend in 1973! Our firewater was confiscated, and we were thrown out of Bodie, California—the best-preserved ghost town in the West.

To see this incredible relic of boom and bust, you will need to travel over highway 50 to highway 395 heading south. The road to Bodie is just south of Bridgeport, CA. It is well marked, but don't let that fool you. Bodie sits at 8400 feet, and the road can be closed by snow from late fall to spring. Bodie was named for William Body who uncovered a vein of surface gold that produced until 1869. The boom town was awash in gunplay and debauchery. In 1877 a failed mine caved in revealing an even bigger vein of gold. Over about 90 years, Bodie produced \$100 million of gold from surface, and cyanide reduction mining. Today, the Bodie State Historic Park has preserved the many ghost town structures left behind.



But wait! There's more. Further South on 395 you come to the Fat Hill mine....Cerro Gordo sits on the western slope of Inyo Mountain outside of Independence; CA. Cerro is remote. It is 8 miles up a very rough former toll road. Mining started in 1866 by Pablo Flores. Cerro was the model for 19th century cutthroat mining operations, but also for 19th century ingenuity. It started with adobe smelters, went to charcoal ovens, then blast furnaces. The silver had to be transported by aerial tramway, then steamboat across the now dry Owens Lake to the Los Angeles Bullion Road. Some 400 bars of silver per day were shipped at the mine's peak. Cerro Gordo was to Los Angeles, what Virginia City and Bodie were to San Francisco in their day. Cerro kept producing zinc and lead up to 1953! Now Brent Underwood (YouTube Cerro Gordo) owns Cerro Gordo. It is an off-road adventure destination.

Book Review -

Bring me the Head of Joaquin Murrieta, by John Boessenecker

I hope you remember Clark Mason's thorough review of the Murrieta book that was published in the Press Democrat and excerpted in the Winter 2026 Gazette. I can confirm that this comprehensive book about the colorful bandito and the larger history of the California gold rush is well worth reading. Well, except for the very gory details that made me a little nauseous.

It is a detailed and factual portrait of California during the violent and often lawless years of gold fever, pieced together with original sources, like letters, diaries, and newspaper stories. I can't wait to meet and hear the author, John Boessenecker, when he lectures in Sonoma in June. [see Upcoming Events, page 3]

—Dee Katson, SPParks Board

More Travel & Enrichment Opportunities

Field Trip to Benicia State Historic Park

Story and photos by Jerry Pozo

Docents from Sonoma & Petaluma State Parks went on a field trip on Friday, January 30, 2026, to tour our 4th capitol in California. Benicia was founded on May 19, 1847 and named for General Vallejo's wife Francisca Benicia Carillo de Vallejo. It is the only remaining pre-Sacramento capitol.

Plenty of relics remain in the building making it seem like everyone just walked away yesterday. The Assembly & Senate rooms look untouched, giving it the feeling of 1853-54.

After a fascinating lecture/tour we walked the streets to see Benicia's architecture and ended up at Sailor Jack's for a seafood meal as the morning fog broke and we could see the Carquinez Bridge.

It was a good day to be a docent in CA State Parks.



[Editor's note: Reese Brooks was a fascinating tour guide, peppering his interpretive presentation with his own personal & colorful genealogy. Thank you, Reese.]

[Editor's note: But wait, there's more. Look for more fascinating information about California's wandering state capitol on page 6.]



Marin History Museum exhibit – Rancho Roots

"Rancho Roots: The Californio Legacy of Marin," explores the lasting legacy of the Californio ranchos in Marin County. Visitors will learn about the Californios—Spanish and Mexican settlers—and how they established ranchos in the early 19th century. The bilingual exhibit highlights the history of and life on these ranchos through artifacts, family stories, and interactive displays in English & Spanish. It also connects the past to the present, showcasing how the ranchos' legacy is still reflected in Marin's farms and place names today. Learn more at:

www.marinhistory.org/exhibits/currentexhibits/

[Editor's note: This museum borrowed several artifacts from Mariano Vallejo's Petaluma Adobe Rancho, including a saddle, a branding iron and other important artifacts. If you have not yet had a chance to visit the museum, there may be a docent field trip in early April. Whether with docents or on your own, don't miss this exhibit that will be open until June 6th.]

MARIN HISTORY MUSEUM

RANCHO ROOTS
The Californio Legacy in Marin

JANUARY 24 – JUNE 6, 2026

Explore Marin's Californio roots through local stories and interactive displays in an engaging bilingual exhibit.

Free Admission
Wed – Sat, 11 am – 3 pm
Boyd Gate House
1125 B Street
San Rafael, CA 94901

California's State Capitols

by Jim Danaher

California became a state on September 9, 1850. Statehood occurred shortly after the time of the "Bear Flag Republic" (June 14 - July 9, 1846) and was one of the quickest in the United States. Usually, a territory was determined and a population base was established before statehood was granted, consistent with the U.S. constitution. California was never declared a "territory" and the population increased so fast that the U.S. congress hastily added it to the Union.

Determining a permanent location for the state's capitol was not as quick. A good number of Californians believe that the first site was Monterey, where the constitution was signed in 1849. However, representatives at Colton Hall (in Monterey) decided upon a two-story adobe hotel located in San Jose (with dimensions of 40 feet x 60 feet) to house the assembly and the senate making San Jose the first state capitol. This location proved too muddy.

On January 14, 1851, Mariano Vallejo proposed that the city of Vallejo should be the state capitol. His proposal was accepted and almost one year later the legislature met there. The new capitol building included a saloon and skittle alley in its basement. The lack of amenities (hotel accommodations, printing facilities) forced another move.

Sacramento, briefly, in 1851, became the capitol until a fire devastated the town. The legislators moved back to Vallejo and met from January 5 until January 12, 1852.

In 1853, Benicia was selected as the new location for the capitol. The existing civic hall was a stately building and provided roomy accommodation for the legislative process but, once again overnight facilities for legislators proved inadequate.



Benicia Capitol - (photo by Jerry Pozo)

In 1854, Sacramento's first county courthouse was chosen. River levees protected the town and wooden sidewalks led to 55 hotels with many brick buildings dotting the town's landscape. Catastrophic rainfall on December 9, 1861 flooded Sacramento (Governor Leland Stanford had to row a boat to his inauguration) and a temporary capitol location was then established at San Francisco's Merchant Exchange building at the corner of Battery and Washington Streets. This three-story, Palladian-style structure was embellished with a dome. A brief legislative meeting convened there from January 24, 1862 to May 15, 1862. Afterward, the legislature returned to Sacramento.

Meanwhile construction had begun on a new building in Sacramento and a cornerstone was laid on May 15, 1861. It would not be until December 6, 1869 when the senate and assembly would convene in their new building and firmly establish Sacramento as the state capitol. A year prior (in 1868) serious efforts were waged to move the capitol to Santa Cruz, San Jose, Oakland, Benicia or San Francisco.

Learn more at: <http://www.parks.ca.gov/pages/684/files/statecaps.pdf>

Illustrations courtesy of California State Library, California State Archives, and California State Parks



CAPITOL AT SAN JOSE -- 1849 - 1851.

Lavawn Whiting: 1930 – 2026

Sad news: one of our most reliable volunteers, Lavawn Whiting, has passed away at the age of 95. Read the full obituary in the Sonoma Index Tribune, [HERE](#)



Memories:

Yvonne Bowers: Lavawn Whiting was a Park docent more years than I can remember; more years than me. She was a tireless volunteer, a wonderful pianist and could be counted on to help with any event. She volunteered every year at the Victorian Craft Fair until 2024. I also remember her as a dedicated member of the Sonoma Valley Woman’s Club and the Sonoma Valley Historical Society. She was a wonderful lady and will be missed!

Dee Katson: When I started volunteering as a docent, I kept seeing Lavawn at every field trip, event, and learning opportunity that I attended. I didn’t get to know her very well, but I certainly saw her as a role model. Lessons from Lavawn: Keep learning and giving all your life. Rest in Peace, Lavawn.

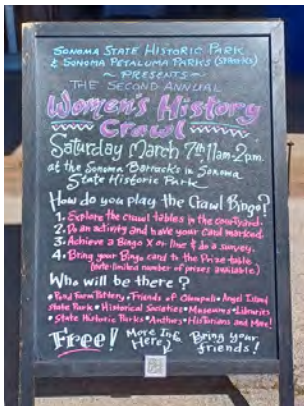


SONOMA STATE HISTORIC PARK EVENTS

Women’s History Crawl - Saturday, March 7, 2026

In collaboration with numerous community partners, the second annual Women's History Crawl returned to the Barracks at Sonoma State Historic Park on a sizzling March Saturday, offering a free, interactive afternoon devoted to the stories of women who shaped California's past. Hundreds of participants and visitors from near and far explored the courtyard with their Bingo cards and scored the many fabulous prizes. A great time was had by all.

(Photos by Dee Katson)



**History Mystery Quiz
Answers**

1. Monarch
2. Oroville Dam
3. Blue & gold
4. Sonoma

Break out your best hat.
It's Tea Time at the Toscano!

The historic Toscano Kitchen, part of Sonoma State Historic Park, will host the third annual Toscano Tea on May 31, 2026. The iconic fundraiser presented by Sonoma Petaluma Parks (SPParks) will feature classic tea sandwiches and sweets by Chefs Lisa Lavagetto and Julie Steinfeld, [The Food Gurus](#). Tea will be served in the Toscano Dining Room specially set for a traditional tea.

The Toscano Tea is a fundraiser presented by SPParks, a cooperating association of California State Parks, dedicated to supporting the awareness, preservation, and interpretation of the Mission, Barracks, Toscano, Vallejo Home, Blue Wing Inn, and Petaluma Adobe historic sites.



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