

GUIDE TO THE BIDWELL MANSION STATE HISTORIC PARK
PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

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Park History

Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park contains roughly five acres of historical resources. Located in Butte County, the park resides at 525 Esplanade in the city of Chico and is bordered to the north and west by California State University, Chico, to the south by Big Chico Creek, and to the east by The Esplanade. The park is accessible by car via The Esplanade.

Prior to its conferral as a 22,214-acre Mexican land grant, the area containing the present-day park was home to the Mechoopda Maidu tribe, a band of Konkow Indians, for thousands of years. Hunter-gatherers, the Mechoopda largely subsisted on large and small game, fish and waterfowl, and a variety of seeds, greens, and acorns. Like many California tribes, the Mechoopda excelled in the art of basketry.

Gabriel Moraga and his team of Spanish explorers were the first Europeans to encounter the area and its people in 1808. 20 years later, European and Euro-American fur trappers began entering Mechoopda country, led by members of Hudson's Bay Company. Within a few years, they had depleted the area's wildlife population. Following the trappers, Euro-American settlers and miners flooded into the region after gold was discovered in 1848. The environmental degradation, disease epidemics, and outright murder and land theft that ensued left the Mechoopda and other tribes in the region decimated, demoralized, and desperate. Unable to sustain themselves by traditional means, Mechoopda Indians found work—and protection from gangs of white vigilantes—as laborers at the local rancho that had displaced them (**Figure 1**).



Figure 1. Mechoopda laborers and ceremonial sweathouse, n.d. Catalog # 090-22664.

In 1844, Governor Manuel Micheltorena granted Rancho del Arroyo Chico (which contains the present-day park) to William Dickey, an employee of John Sutter. Five years later, Dickey sold the rancho to George McKinstry, another Sutter employee, who

sold half-interest to John Bidwell that same year. In 1850, McKinstry sold his other half-interest to Justus McKinstry, who in turn also sold that to Bidwell the following year.

Originally hailing from Chautauqua County, New York, in 1841 John Bidwell rose to prominence as one of the earliest overland pioneers to migrate to California (**Figure 2**). Following James Marshall's gold discovery, Bidwell struck a productive claim at Bidwell Bar on the Feather River and invested the proceeds in land. A major in the Mexican-American War, Bidwell also served as California State Senator from 1849 to 1851, directed the 1850 and 1860 state censuses, obtained the title of Brigadier General with the California Militia in 1863, served as U.S. Congressman from 1865 to 1867, and ran for state governor in 1875 and 1880 and for U.S. president in 1892.



Figure 2. John Bidwell, ca. 1858. Catalog # 090-23188.

While serving as a U.S. Congressman in Washington, D.C., Bidwell met his future wife, Annie Ellicott Kennedy (**Figure 3**). Daughter to the Census Bureau Director, Joseph Camp Griffith Kennedy, Annie Kennedy was a Presbyterian activist involved with myriad organizations, such as the National Woman's Indian Association, the Prohibition Party, the National Woman Suffrage Association, and many others. The two were married in Washington before returning to Bidwell's ranch in 1868. At the rancho, Mrs. Bidwell zealously committed herself to educating and Christianizing the Mechoopda Indians.



Figure 3. Annie Ellicott Kennedy, n.d. Catalog # 090-23164.

Rancho del Arroyo Chico underwent numerous changes during the Bidwells' tenure. In his first year there, John Bidwell established a store, an inn, and a farm, followed soon after by a log cabin, a storehouse, a general store, an office, a hotel, a kitchen, a dining room, a carpenter shop, a granary, a flour mill, and a stable. After a band of Indians, referred to as "Sulamsheew," "Choloma," and "Mill Creek Indians," burned the complex to the ground in 1852, Bidwell erected a two-story adobe house (later razed along with several other buildings by 1872) (**Figure 4**). In 1860, Bidwell donated 900 acres of his rancho to establish the town of Chico, which quickly grew into the most populous city in Butte County (**Figure 5**). Between 1865 and 1868, he constructed the three-story, 26-room Italianate Villa-style mansion that stands there currently (**Figure 6**). Designed by San Francisco architect Henry W. Cleaveland, the home possessed numerous modern amenities: running water, flush toilets, gas lights, and an air-cooling system. In the 1880s, Bidwell donated eight acres of his cherry orchard to establish Chico State Normal School, which ultimately became California State University, Chico (**Figure 7**).



Figure 4. Rancho del Arroyo Chico, ca. 1854. Catalog # 090-23179.



Figure 5. Broadway in downtown Chico, n.d. Catalog # 090-22949.

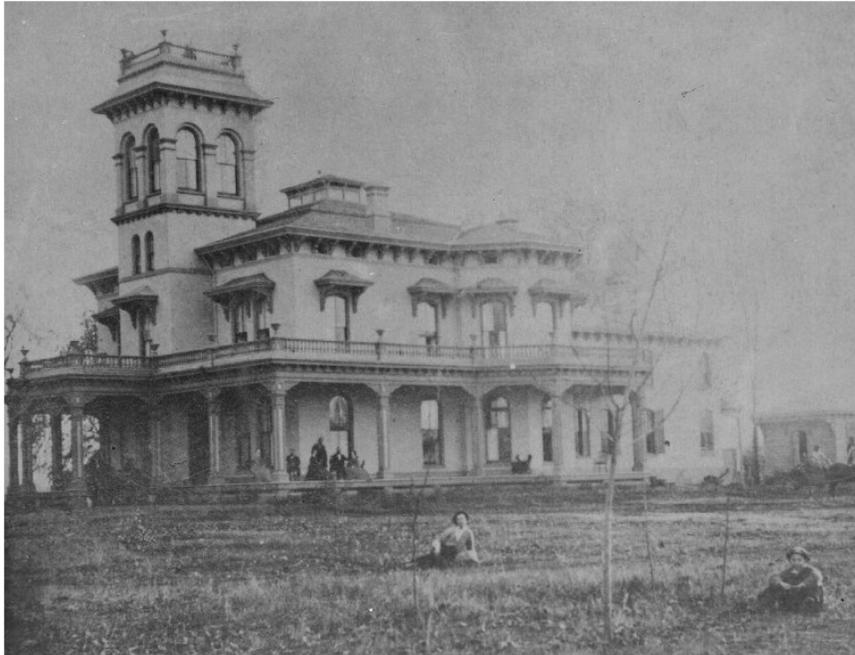


Figure 6. Bidwell Mansion, ca. 1868. Catalog # 090-22954.



Figure 7. Chico State Normal School, December 26, 1897. Catalog # 090-22460.

Bidwell established a thriving agrarian enterprise at Rancho del Arroyo Chico. Employing Mechoopda and Chinese labor (a source of local controversy), Bidwell planted fruit tree orchards, grain, and numerous other crops in addition to raising cattle and horses. The rancho contained a commercial dairy, a commercial nursery, a flower

garden, canneries, packing houses, an apiary, and a deer park. Bidwell brought several innovations to California agriculture such as rotating crops, using animal manure as fertilizer, and applying integrated pest management in addition to introducing casaba melons, Bermuda grass, almonds, and raisins to the region (**Figures 8-10**).



Figure 8. Mechoopda employees hulling almonds, n.d. Catalog # 090-22885.



Figure 9. Chinese Employees spraying cherry trees, n.d. Catalog # 090-22871.



Figure 10. Anglo-American employees dipping sheep, ca. 1874. Catalog # 090-23902.

John Bidwell died in 1900. Before Annie Bidwell followed him in 1918, she deeded the property to the College Board of the Presbyterian Church for use as a coeducational Christian school. Unable to maintain the property, the Presbyterian Church sold it to the Chico State Normal School in 1923. In 1956, Chico community members formed the Bidwell Mansion Restoration Association in order to better preserve the historic property and compel its transfer to the State of California in 1963. The park was classified a state historic monument in 1964, and later reclassified a state historic park in 1970.

California State Parks, coordinating with the North Valley Community Foundation and the Bidwell Mansion Association—an entity formed from the 1979 merger between the Bidwell Mansion Restoration Association and the Bidwell Mansion Cooperating Association, formed in 1973—maintain and interpret historical resources at Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park (**Figures 11 and 12**). In addition to the mansion, listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1972, the park also contains the historic carriage shed and architect's house as well as a Visitor Center and museum. The mansion is open Saturday through Monday and is available for guided tours only.



Figure 11. Bidwell Mansion, June 11, 2009. Catalog # 090-P64641.



Figure 12. Bidwell Mansion interior, June 12, 2009. Catalog # 090-P64747.

Scope and Content

The Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park Photographic Collection spans the years 1844-2009. While nearly 40 percent of the collection is undated, the bulk of the remainder covers the years 1844-1923, 1960-1988, 2001, and 2009. There is a total of 837 cataloged images including 581 photographic prints, scans, and negatives, 175 35mm slides, and 81 born-digital images. Photographs originated from California State Parks staff and several other sources including the published work of early John Bidwell biographer, Colonel C. C. Royce.

The collection mainly depicts interior and exterior views of the Bidwell Mansion. Historic and contemporary exterior views feature the Italianate Villa's facade from numerous vantages and include candid shots of John and Annie Bidwell. The house's ornate detailing and surrounding vegetation are also featured. Historic and contemporary interior views document the library, the main entrance, the dining room, bedrooms, dressing rooms, bathrooms, the pantry, the office, the servants' dining area, the parlor, the sewing room, the nursery, and the kitchen, with all attendant period furnishings. Also included are several close-up shots of numerous artifacts, such as a silver pitcher, a phonograph, Annie Bidwell's wedding shoes, a wooden bootjack, Victorian hair wreaths, a traveling trunk, a cradle, a bed warmer, a fan, a stove, pie-cooling racks, a soup tureen, and Native-American baskets. Interior views also feature DPR staff and volunteers conducting guided tours for park visitors.

The collection also depicts contemporary interior and exterior views of the park's other buildings, the Visitor Center and the historic Carriage House. Interior views of the Visitor Center feature diagrams, the gift shop, and interpretive panels in addition to DPR staff, volunteers, and park visitors. Interior views of the Carriage House feature period carriages.

The collection features numerous historic portraits of John and Annie Ellicott Kennedy Bidwell which date from the 1860s until their respective deaths in 1900 and 1918. Some portraits of Mrs. Bidwell feature guests in various rooms in the mansion and in the flower garden.

Also included are several historic images from Rancho del Arroyo Chico. Some features and locations include: various sites along Big Chico Creek that show an irrigation dam, the historic footbridge, the Sierra Lumber Company's flume, and William's Orchard Crossing; the gated entrance to the grounds; and the cherry orchard that includes land later donated to the Chico State Normal School. Other features include: Hooker Oak, named by Annie Bidwell in 1887 after Director of the Royal Botanical Gardens, Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker, and featured in the 1938 film, *The Adventures of Robin Hood*; Rancho Chico Dairy; Bidwell's Grist Mill; and Rancho Chico Flour Mill. Historic images also feature such agricultural activities as cherry-tree spraying, almond hulling, wheat harvesting, sheep grazing, and sheep dipping conducted by Bidwell's multicultural team of Euro-American, Mechoopda, and Chinese laborers.

Also featured are several historic Mechoopda-related images. Individual and group portraits document ranch workers and bands of musicians. A traditional Mechoopda Sweat House located on the rancho and the Indian Church at the neighboring Chico Rancheria are also depicted.

The collection additionally documents historic downtown Chico. Several buildings are depicted including the Joss and Lemon houses, the Park, Sequoia, and Chico hotels, Butte County Bank, the Morehead Building, Oakdale School, the Kenney & Treffry Residence, the Bidwell Store, Pennicks Garage, the firehouse, and Fisher's Theatre. Also included are numerous downtown street views as well as town events such as the 1898 Chinese Parade.

The collection also includes several miscellaneous scanned historic documents. Items include: drawings and etchings of the Bidwell Mansion, the Fashion Stables, the Chico Water & Gas Works, the Chico Presbyterian Church, Sutter's Fort, the Chico State Normal School, and Rancho del Arroyo Chico; maps of the U. S. overland routes, Rancho de Nueva Charrante, and Rancho del Arroyo Chico; daguerreotypes depicting the Rancho Chico Store and Rancho del Arroyo Chico. Further items include: textual documents, such as letters, invitations, John Bidwell's notes on Maidu vocabulary, John and Annie Bidwell's marriage license; mansion floorplans; advertisements for Rancho Chico Nursery, Rancho del Arroyo Chico Olive Oil, and the California-Oregon Railroad; a pamphlet for the Butte County Citrus Fair; and numerous articles related to John and Annie Bidwell published in various contemporary newspapers.

Related Collections

Annie E. K. Bidwell Papers, California State Library: California History Room.

Bidwell Family Papers, UC Berkeley: Bancroft Library.

Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park Collection, California State Parks Archives.

John Bidwell Account Book, California State University, Chico: Special Collections.

John Bidwell Letters, UC Berkeley: Bancroft Library.

John Bidwell Papers, California State Library: California History Room.

John Bidwell Papers, California State University, Chico: Special Collections.

Views of Rancho Chico and other California Views from the Annie E. K. Bidwell Collection, UC Berkeley: Bancroft Library.

Catalog Subject Search Terms

Advertisement	Daguerreotype
Aerial view	Dining room
Annie Ellicott Kennedy Bidwell	Document
Article	Drawing
Bedroom	Entrance
Bidwell Mansion	Esplanade
Big Chico Creek	Etching
Carriage house	Exhibit panel
Chico	Exterior
Chico Creek	Footbridge
Chico Creek Bridge	Grounds

Group portrait
Hooker Oak
Indian Church
Interior
John Bidwell
Landscape view
Letter
Library
Map
Mechoopda Indian(s)
Normal School

Nursery
Office
Painting
Parlor
Portrait
Rancho Chico Office
Rancho del Arroyo Chico
Sewing room
Sierra Lumber Company
Street view
Visitor Center