

GUIDE TO THE COLONEL ALLENSWORTH STATE HISTORIC PARK  
PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

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## COLONEL ALLENSWORTH STATE HISTORIC PARK PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

### **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 (**Figure 1**). 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 (**Figure 2**).



Schoolhouse building was constructed, and a branch of the Tulare County Free Library was dedicated the following year (**Figures 3 and 4**). 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.



**Figure 3.** Allensworth Elementary School, ca. 1915. Catalog # 090-2123.



**Figure 4.** Tulare County Free Library (Mary Dickenson Memorial Library), n.d.  
Catalog # 090-2144.

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 (**Figures 5, 6, and 7**). 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.



**Figure 5.** Restored home of Col. Allensworth, 1982. Catalog # 090-S8766.



**Figure 6.** Restored Allensworth Elementary School, March 18, 2008. Catalog # 090-P57336.



**Figure 7.** Restored Tulare County Free Library (Mary Dickenson Memorial Library), March 17, 2008. Catalog # 090-P57214.

## Scope and Content

The Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park Photographic Collection spans the years 1852-2014, with the bulk of the collection covering the years 1910-1920, 1960-1970, 1976-1982, 1995-2000, 2008, and 2014. There is a total of 1,148 cataloged images including 546 photographic prints, scans, and negatives, 318 35mm slides, and 284 born-digital images. Photographs originated primarily from California State Parks staff and former residents of Allensworth.

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.

## **Related Collections**

Allensworth Materials, Tulare County Library: Annie R. Mitchell History Room.

Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway Collection, California State Railroad Museum Library.

Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park Collection, California State Parks Archives.

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.

## **Catalog Subject Search Terms**

Advertisement	Bill Towns
Aerial view	Boxcar
Allen Allensworth	Buffalo Soldiers
Allensworth	California Colony and Home Promoting Association
Allensworth Elementary School	Carter House
Allensworth Hotel	Centennial event
Alwortha Hall	Colonel Allensworth Home
Artesian well(s)	Dedication
Ashby House	Document
Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad	

Dodson House  
DPR employees  
Effie Wells  
Exhibit  
Exterior view  
First Baptist Church  
Hackett House  
Henry Towns  
Hindsman House  
Horace Wheaton  
Illustration  
Interior view  
Johnson Bakery  
Josephine Leavell Allensworth  
Landscape view  
Mary Dickinson Memorial Library  
Mary Jane Bickers  
Mayme Panky  
Milner House  
Oscar O. Overr  
Pacific Farming Company  
Phillips House  
Portrait  
Roy Towns  
San Joaquin Valley  
Scott-Grosse Drug Store  
Singleton General Store/Post Office  
Smith House  
Stockett House  
Tulare County  
Tulare County Free Library  
U. S. Army  
Wallace Towns  
Walter Wells