



CALIFORNIA ORIGINALS

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CALIFORNIA
STATE ARCHIVES

From the State Archivist

We all belong to communities. Wikipedia defines a community as “a small or large social unit (a group of people), who have something in common, such as norms, religion, values, or identity. Often - but not always - communities share a sense of place that is situated in a given geographical area (e.g. a country, village, town, or neighborhood).”

California is made up of many different types of communities, some having historic roots, many no longer in existence. This issue of *California Originals* takes a look at a few historic California settlements and other communities and how they became established and perhaps declined.

Please join our community of researchers and visit the State Archives to learn more about Allensworth (the community established by African-Americans in the early 20th century that became a State Park), Durham and Delhi (state-sponsored land settlements), and more.

Nancy Zimmerman Lenoil

Allensworth

Realization and Resurrection of an African-American Dream

Although many pioneers came to California in search of riches, Lt. Colonel Allen Allensworth came to the state in a quest for liberty. In 1908, he created Allensworth as an African-American community in southern Tulare County – a community that would allow its residents to work and flourish without fear of discrimination. Within a few years, it had all the appearances of a prosperous central valley town. Yet due to tragic and outside forces, within another decade Allensworth began a steady decline. By the time the California Dept. of Parks and Recreation (DPR) became interested in preserving the town's history in the late 1960s, it was no longer even on some maps. African-American civic leaders and scholars championed the historic value of the town, and through their efforts, the ideals of Allensworth endure.

Allen Allensworth was born into slavery in 1842 in Kentucky. Despite discriminatory laws and societal pressures, he learned to read and write. His third escape attempt was successful, and he joined an Illinois regiment in 1862 as an infantry aid. He transferred to the Union navy the following year, and by the end of the Civil War had reached the rank of first class petty officer. Allensworth attended college in Kentucky, studied theology, and was ordained in 1871. After extended entreaties by himself and others, President Cleveland appointed him Chaplain to the segregated 24th Division, at the rank of Captain. Not only did he seek to nurture his troops' spiritual selves, but their educational and societal responsibilities as well. After twenty years of service, which included going to Cuba and the Philippines during the Spanish-American War, he retired at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, the highest achieved by an African-American at that time.

On retirement in 1900, Allensworth and his family moved to Los Angeles, where he soon became well known for his stirring speeches on self-improvement and politics. Numerous newspapers throughout the West Coast publicized his orations on the “Five Manly Virtues” and self-determination, and he frequently shared the stage with prominent national politicians. He spoke strongly of the need for African-Americans to achieve prosperity through thrift, self-betterment, and hard work. While on the lecture circuit, he discussed with William Payne, an assistant school principal, the crushing effects of racism and segregation on black lives. They decided to put theory into practice by creating a community

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“Preserving and Promoting the History of California”



Allensworth

Realization and Resurrection of an African-American Dream (cont'd)

in which solely African-Americans would live, work, and flourish together. The community would be a place where blacks would manage their own affairs, control their own destinies, and show whites that they were not genetically inferior.

In the records of the Secretary of State at the California State Archives are the incorporation documents for the California Colony and Home Promoting Association. Founded in 1908 by Allensworth, Payne, J.W. Palmer, W.H. Peck, and Harry Mitchell, the goals of the association were to purchase land, lay out a town and surrounding farms, and resell the lots to African-Americans, to create a community “favorable to intellectual and industrial liberty.” They decided on an area approximately 30 miles north of Bakersfield where the land was cheap and the water appeared plentiful, and named it Allensworth.

Within a few years, the town expanded dramatically. By 1914, the town grew to over 300 inhabitants who patronized its churches, school, two general stores, hotel, and other businesses. Cattle, chickens, grain, and sugar beets grew over the 900 acres of deeded land. The town had its own railway stop, post office, hotel, and library. Its citizens elected the state's first African-American justice of the peace.

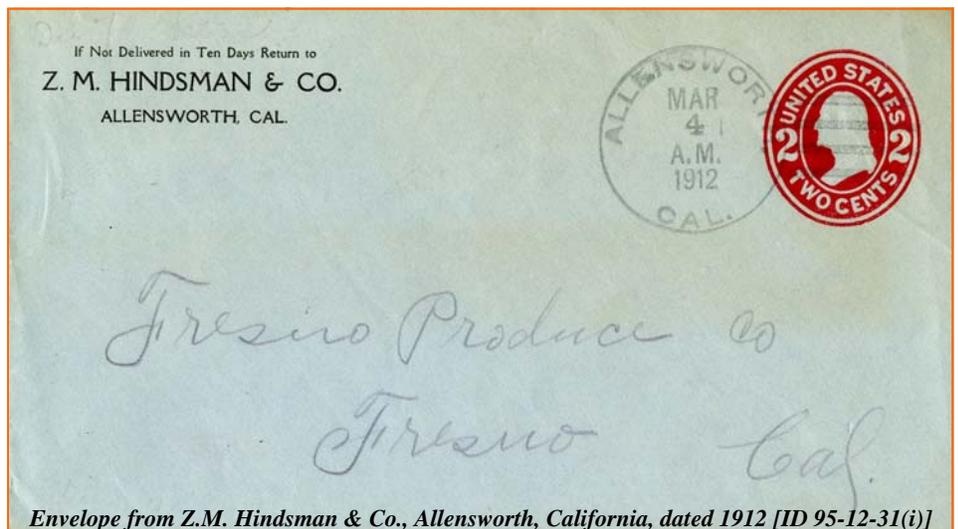
Newspapers from around the country took notice and touted

Allensworth's prosperity and development as a model black town, without any interference from a single white person. African-Americans from around California and the country came to settle amongst its tree-lined streets and grassy vistas. Along with Booker T. Washington Park, the town planners named its avenues after prominent African-Americans, such as Attucks and Sojourner streets, and also Civil War heroes Lincoln and Grant. Philanthropic, civil, and social organizations such as the Girls' Glee Club, Theater Club, and Debate Club enhanced the sense of a pleasant and solid community.

Yet soon after reaching its apex, Allensworth began its equally swift decline. Chief amongst the reasons cited was the premature death of Lt. Col. Allensworth in a Los Angeles pedestrian accident in 1914. The loss of its founder and spiritual leader shook the community. The Santa Fe Railroad added a spur line to Alpaugh, purposefully bypassing Allensworth, so white citizens would not have to interact with Allensworth residents. This move deprived the town of its important commercial artery. Another reason for the decline revolved around water. The private water company that had committed to providing water to the community did not honor that commitment. By the time the town was able to get control of its own water system, the water table had dropped far below the outdated equipment's capability to bring it forth. When the United States entered World War II, most of the remaining workers relocated to Los Angeles or Oakland for war production jobs.

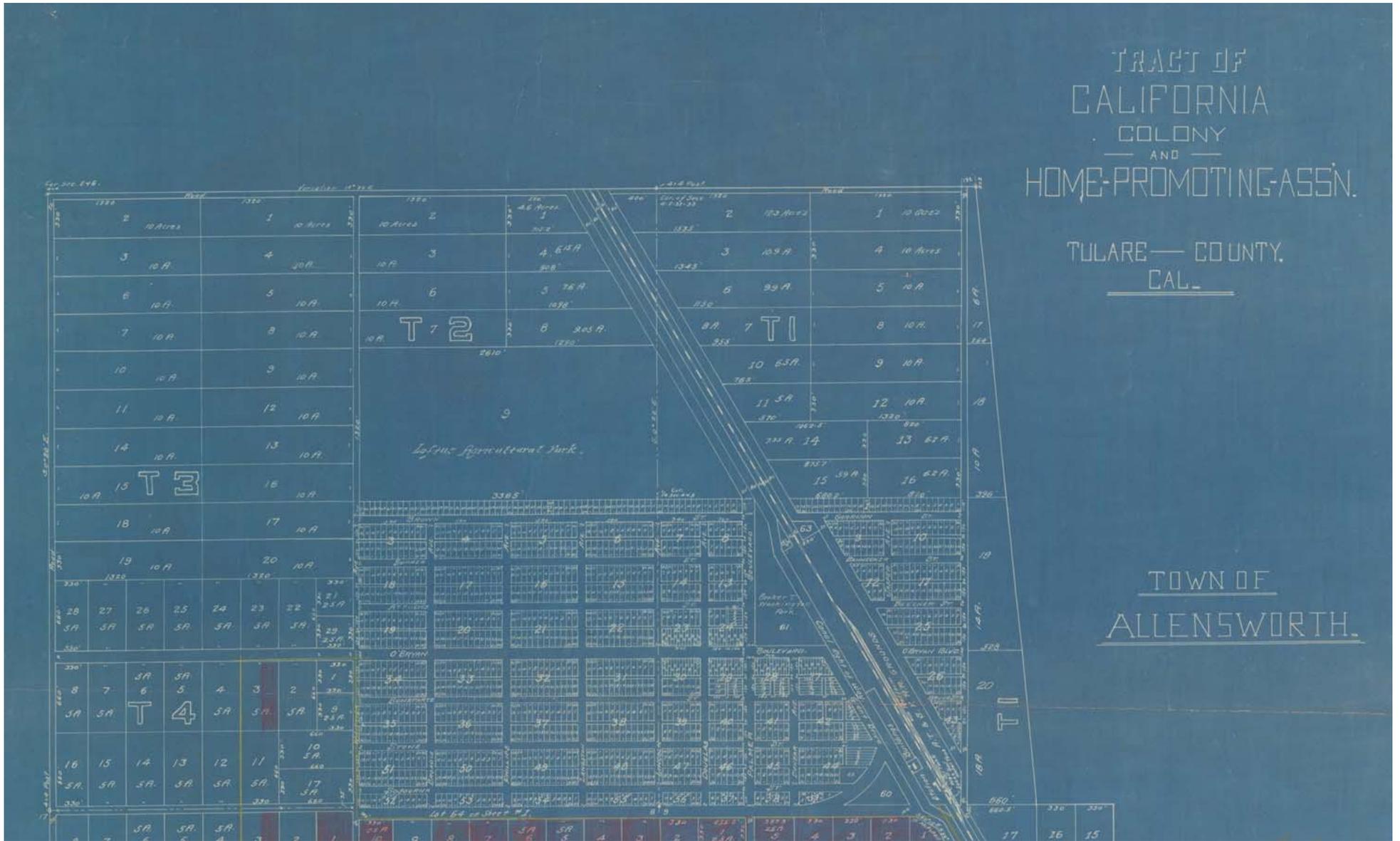
The Dept. of Education's Common School Reports at the Archives sadly chart the decline of this once vibrant community. In 1914 (the earliest period for which the reports are available), the school had an average of 35 students and in 1916, 40 students. However, by 1922 only 17 students were in attendance and by 1926, attendance averaged only 10 students in Allensworth.

(cont'd)



Envelope from Z.M. Hindsman & Co., Allensworth, California, dated 1912 [ID 95-12-31(i)]

Allensworth



Partial town plat for Allensworth, Records of the Public Utilities Commission [ID F3725:5438]



Allensworth

Realization and Resurrection of an African-American Dream (cont'd)

Years later, in 1967, water inspectors discovered that the main water supply contained high concentrations of arsenic. By that time, only a few individuals and itinerant farmworkers lived in the ramshackle houses. In 1969, Tulare County government officials planned to sell to local ranchers over a dozen properties in a tax lien sale.

During the late-1960s, DPR received a suggestion to consider Allensworth as a state park. The papers of State Senator Howard Way and the records of the Dept. of Parks and Recreation relate the beginnings of preservation of this historic town. Ed Pope, a young black landscape architect for the DPR and a resident of a near-by town, understood the historical significance of Allensworth and researched a proposal on his own time. He tied the complete lack of representation of the African-American experience in the California state park system and the contemporaneous civil rights struggle with the need to save Allensworth. Pope's memo to William Penn Mott, Jr., director of DPR, stated that farming corporations' purchases would soon erase any sign of Allensworth's existence. He wrote:

The times we live in are perilous. Men are no longer content to turn the other cheek. The quantities of patience and forbearance that enabled Colonel Allensworth to endure the degradations of slavery, to be sold as chattel property, to escape the institution of slavery, and to volunteer his life as a soldier fighting for the survival of his country; and yet be inspired to establish a home and community where others could live with freedom and dignity – these qualities are not common among us. The opportunity to preserve this history is available to us now. In preserving it, we will be saying that we see that futility that has borne the fruits of violence in our time.

Director Mott was soon on board with the idea, stating in his April 1969 letter to Governor Reagan, “I believe we have been delinquent in our historical perspective and interpretation program in not having given attention to the contributions made by our Black citizens. The Allensworth project, at first glance, appears to me to be one which could give us a start in correcting that deficiency.”

Governor Reagan approved appropriations that allowed exploration of the project. Senate Concurrent Resolution 124, introduced in May 1969 by Senator Mervyn Dymally, the first African-American to serve in the State Senate, expressed the support of the legislature in DPR's efforts to preserve the Allensworth community. Subsequent legislation created a feasibility study for the park (*Resolution Chapter 176, Statutes of 1970*), established the Allensworth Advisory Committee (*Chapter 1506, Statutes of 1970*), and appropriated money to purchase the tax lien parcels from Tulare County and residents (*Chapter 1427, Statutes of 1972*).

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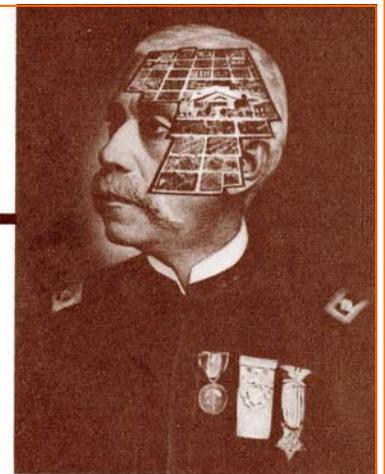
Allensworth Historical Project

Allensworth
Advisory Committee

The qualities of patience and forbearance that enabled Col. Allensworth

- . *To endure the degradations of slavery*
- . *To be sold as chattel property*
- . *To escape the institution of slavery*
- . *To volunteer his life to save this nation*
- . *And yet be inspired to establish a community where others might live in freedom and dignity – These qualities are not common among us.*

THE OPPORTUNITY TO PRESERVE THIS HISTORY IS CONFRONTING US NOW



Letterhead for the Allensworth Advisory Committee, Howard Way Papers, Subject Files: Allensworth [ID LP174:176-177]



Allensworth

Realization and Resurrection of an African-American Dream (cont'd)

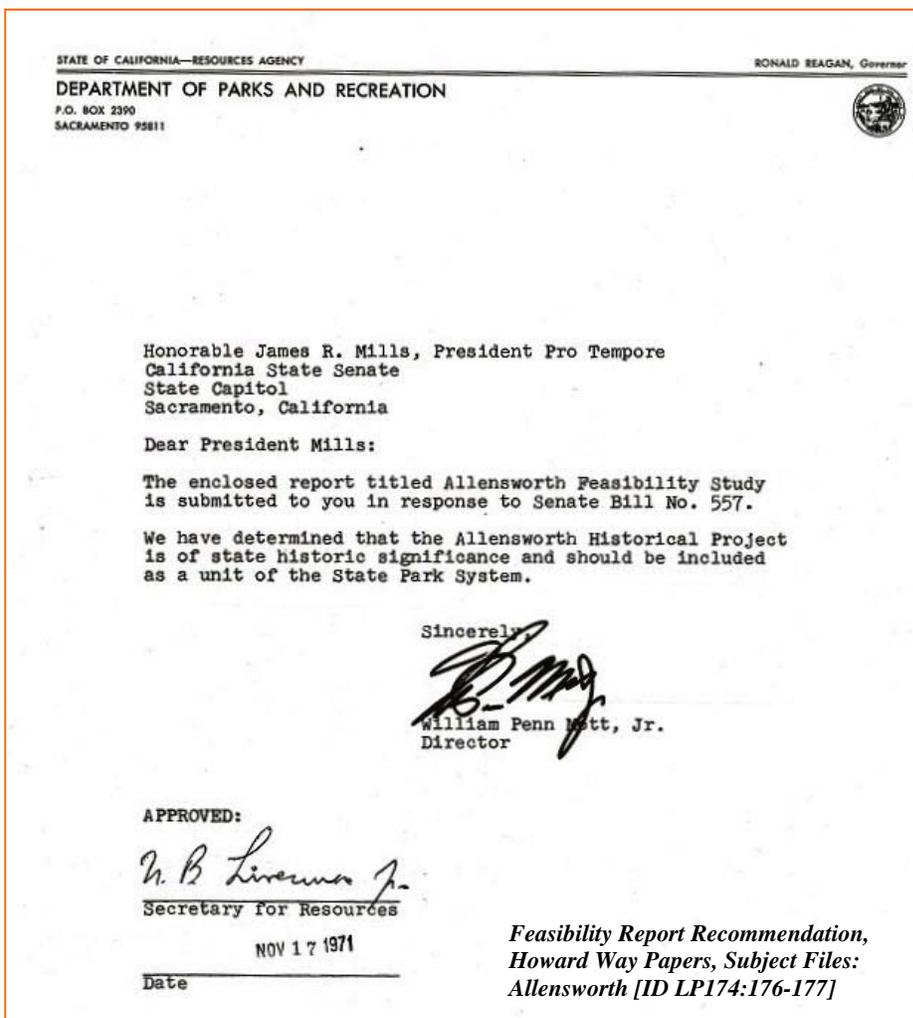
Prominent African-American churches, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and other black civic and social organizations supported the efforts to establish Allensworth as a state park. The Advisory Committee was composed of leading black historians, civic leaders, former Allensworth residents and their descendants, Ed Pope, and Dr. Kenneth Goode, Assistant Chancellor at the University of California, Berkeley, who served as the chair of the committee. The oaths of office for each member of the committee are at the Archives.

Yet many opposed the decision to create a state park at Allensworth. Howard Way, the area's state senator, agreed that some sort of center that discussed the African-American experience in California could be appropriate, but he felt it should be located in an area, such as Pomona or Watts, where there was a larger concentration of blacks. As detailed in his papers held at the Archives, this completely missed the point of preserving the historical significance of Allensworth itself. Advisory Committee member Al Greene retorted, "I believe in the restoration of Allensworth because it is history – it is a focal point to portraying history of blacks in California – they certainly did exist – they certainly did contribute to California development and it certainly must be told so all of us can appreciate blacks as Americans too."

Based on the recommendations of the Advisory Committee, and the vocal outpouring of support for the project, the legislature decided to preserve Allensworth (*Chapter 1427, Statutes of 1972*). Over the course of the next few years, the DPR restored or rebuilt over two dozen buildings, including Colonel Allensworth's residence, the town church, the school, a hotel, and a general store. DPR furnished the interiors of these buildings with items from around 1915, when the town enjoyed its heyday. Landscaping restored the attractiveness of the town and created accommodations for large gatherings and festivals. Allensworth officially became a California State Historical Park in 1976.

Today, Allensworth is a proud part of the California State Park System and a testament to the tenacious dreams of both its founders and those who sought to preserve it. The park hosts Black History Month activities, an Old-Time Jubilee, and Juneteenth celebrations and has an annual attendance of over 5,000 visitors. For more information about Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park, visit the [Dept. of Parks and Recreation website](#).

By Beth Behnam, Archivist





Staff Favorites

California's State Land Settlements

In 1917, California established the State Land Settlement Board with the passage of Senate Bill 584 (*Chapter 755, Statutes of 1917*). Called the State Land Settlement Act, the bill appropriated \$260,000 for the establishment of rural settlements aimed at providing a way for people who might otherwise not have the means to afford it, to own and work farmland. The program was the brainchild of Elwood Mead, professor at the University of California at Berkeley, who had experience with rural colonies in Australia on which he hoped to base the program.

Prior to establishing the State Land Settlement Board, Governor Hiram Johnson appointed a commission to "investigate and consider the question of land colonization and the various forms of land banks, cooperative credit unions, and other rural credit systems adopted or proposed in this country or elsewhere." In its 1915 circular, this commission (the State Commission on Land Colonization and Rural Credits) noted that programs, "in other countries which aim to provide for aid in the purchase and improvement of farms has in every case been a financial success and a benefit to all classes of people." Mead, who chaired the commission, sought to emulate the success of these programs in California. The State Land Settlement Board's program was to bet its success on cooperation and the ability of the state to pool resources together to help develop rural land in ways that would not be feasible for farmers with limited resources by improving irrigation, infrastructure, and testing soil for farming appropriateness.

The first settlement project began in Durham, located in Butte County, with the state procuring 6,239 acres of irrigated land. In order to participate in the project, the board established an application process. To be considered for the participation, settlers needed to meet minimum qualifications that included having some capital as well as a practical knowledge of soil and climate. Applicants had to have the ability to prove to the board that they were fit to successfully cultivate and develop the allotment for which they applied.

Early reports by the Land Settlement Board determined that the colony at Durham was proving successful and profitable production after just two years of settlement. They noted a strong sense of community, with all but two farmers engaging in a cooperative to pool their resources and market through a common agency to command a higher price for their goods. The board observed, "The spirit of cooperation that prevails at the Durham State

Land Settlement Colony is the thing that impresses a person most forcibly when visiting the colony." The settlement developed a social life with the establishment of a twenty-two acre park, a dance hall, and the Durham fair.



*Durham Land Colony
"Club House," undated
Records of the Dept. of
Finance, Links Photographs
[ID F3254:16(2)]*



Staff Favorites

California's State Land Settlements (cont'd)

The legislature amended the land settlement act in 1919 to provide for cooperation with the United State government in providing farms for ex-soldiers, sailors, marines, and others who served in the armed forces returning from World War I. The rural setting was thought to aid soldier's symptoms of "shell shock." However, the board's report for 1920 stated,

The men suffering from shell shock, injuries, and tuberculosis can get out of such a life what they cannot get elsewhere. . . . This phase of soldier settlement ought to be managed by a Board entirely apart from the Land Settlement proper. It ought to have a different appropriation and there ought to be no expectation that all the money appropriated would be returned direct to the treasury. Such a result is not possible, nor would it be possible under the Land Settlement Act, if any of its present safeguards are removed.

Many ex-soldiers were admitted to the settlement at Delhi, in Merced County. The state had purchased 8,561 acres of land to begin this second settlement. Unfortunately, Delhi suffered issues immediately due to a lack of sufficient funds and available credit to settlers. The state was forced to reduce the cost of the land in order to attract settlers. By 1925, the Delhi settlement as a whole was viewed as a financial failure, with many settlers defaulting on loans for their land. The project was operating under an increasing deficit and the situation did not improve.

Though the settlement at Durham initially thrived, the good times did not last. Factors such as poor land, crop failures, difficult economic times, and high expenses eventually led to the failure of the both the Durham and Delhi settlements. In 1921, the powers and duties of the State Land Settlement Board were transferred to the new Dept. of Public Works, Division of Land Settlement and the board was continued only in an advisory capacity. Two years later, the duties and powers were transferred back to the board. In 1927, the Dept. of Agriculture, Division of Land Settlement assumed the responsibilities of the board, which now consisted of three ex officio members: the Directory of Agriculture, the State Engineer, and the Director of Finance. Finally, in 1931, Senator C.H. Deuel, who had advocated for the State Land Settlement Act in 1917, sponsored legislation (Senate Bill 438, *Chapter 153, Statutes of 1931*), designed to take California out of the land settlement business.

By Michael McNeil, Archivist



*Delhi Colony,
"One of the Staff houses, garage, &
pump house. 27 pump houses on
project," undated
Records of the Dept. of Finance,
Links Photographs
[ID F3254:15(4)]*



Records in the Spotlight

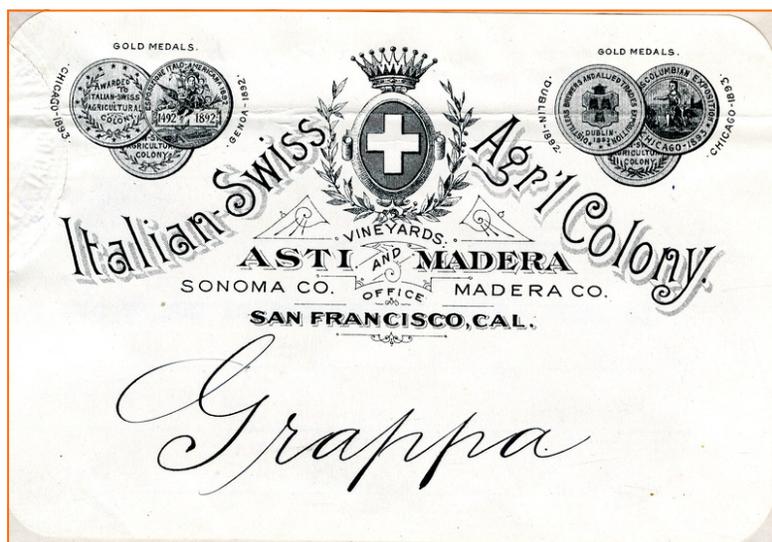
Land Colonies and Agricultural Settlements - Incorporated

In the mid-1870s, California was coming out of the euphoria, confusion, and economic frenzy that marked the gold rush. As people from all over the world rushed in, many recognized that it wasn't just those hard flakes of yellow that could lead to the dreamed of riches. The promised wealth one could gain from the vast acreage of open lands was astounding. The main obstacle that stood between agriculturally unproductive land and bountiful harvests was that of moving water to the dry, arid places that had little or no natural rainfall. The innovations and advancements in irrigation technologies provided a way around that obstacle.

Agricultural productivity in parts of the newly formed state had already proven its value. As the Gold Rush era waned, so began the movement to irrigate, settle, and make profitable all that open land. While the history of land ownership and water rights in California is far too involved to address here, this article will focus on the attempts to lure settlers in by promoting the idea of agricultural colonies.

Investors and those seeking to provide a place for like-minded people to settle formed irrigation and land companies left and right in early attempts to capitalize on the available water sources. The envisioned settlements were directly tied to the formation of irrigation companies because the need for dependable and adequate water sources was paramount to their success. In those instances where settlements were not intertwined with irrigation companies, the plans soon failed.

Specific national or ethnic groups were often targeting by the companies. In the records at the California State Archives, we find articles of incorporation for the Italian-Swiss Agricultural Colony, founded in 1881 by Andrea Sbarboro. The stated purpose of the corporation was to "buy and sell agricultural lands for colonial and for other purposes; to cultivate the same; to manufacture, buy and sell wines and spirits; to deal in the products of said lands and all matters and things appertaining to the purposes herein specified." While the document does not specifically state that only people of Italian-Swiss ancestry were welcome, those were indeed the very people who settled there.



*"Grappa" - Italian-Swiss Agricultural Colony Trademark, filed May 9, 1900
Records of the Secretary of State's Office, Inactive Trademarks
[ID TM3662]*

People of Danish ancestry were encouraged to settle in the Danish-American Colony, in the Santa Ynez Valley. Called Solvang, the community thrived and is known today as the Danish Capital of America. The Danes also established the Holland Land Company in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta at Clarksburg in 1916. The Holland Land Company's sole purpose at that time was to protect the assets of the Netherlands Farms Company, which faced dissolution because of financial difficulties and the outbreak of war in Europe.

(cont'd)



Records in the Spotlight (cont'd)

In 1913, the Scandinavian-American Colonies of California incorporated. Its stated objectives were

. . . to promote and to develop all of the resources of the State of California and to encourage the settlement and development of its farming lands; to establish colonies of desirable citizens in various places in State of California, and particularly, to direct the movement of American citizens of Scandinavian ancestry to said State of California . . . to establish colonies of reputable and desirable citizens and Americans of Scandinavian descent and ancestry . . .

Several years earlier, in 1907, Japanese immigrant Kyutaro Abiko formed the American Land and Produce Company. Abiko created the Yamato Colony, near Livingston, mainly for Japanese immigrants; however, nowhere in the articles of incorporation does it state that the venture was only for Japanese.

Abiko owned several Japanese language newspapers and advertised the availability of the 40-acre plots to a very specific audience. For other colony organizations, the Colonist's Guide and Publishing Company, formed in 1885, could provide assistance

. . . in the development of the material resources of the State of California, to convey general and special reliable information concerning such resources to actual and intending settlers in the State, to further desirable immigration to the said State and to do all matters and things with or in furtherance of such general purpose.

The Colonist's Guide and Publishing Company forfeited its status as a corporation when it failed to pay its license tax in 1905. No evidence exists that they actually produced any guides!

In addition to targeting settlers of specific national or ethnic backgrounds, individuals in different religious groups were also encouraged to move and settle in California's Central Valley. A large colony of Mennonites took up residence in Reedley in Merced County and the Old German Baptists Brethren in Wood Colony near Modesto. The Mound City Land and Water Company's failed tourist destination became the city of Loma Linda, which had its beginnings as a Seventh-Day Adventists sanitarium.

The Little Landers Corporation, founded in 1908 by William F. Smythe, encouraged the settlement of one-acre plots to promote the making of self-supporting homes. With the motto of "A Little Land and a Living," the Little Landers flourished for a little over a decade before succumbing to not only natural forces, but political and economic forces as well.

Finally, there was the social utopian experiment, Llano del Rio. Founded by ardent socialist Job Harriman, Llano del Rio was located in the Antelope Valley (north of Los Angeles) and was, for a short time, a settlement that ran on the ideals of its socialist founders. However, political in-fighting, economic disparity, and once again the lack of a continued and accessible water source saw the end of the colony. After peaking in about 1917, the colony slowly dissolved and declared bankruptcy in 1918. What is left today is California Historical Landmark #933.

Not all of these settlements remain only as historical landmarks. Some remnants can be found in the urban areas of today. For example, in the Sacramento region there are the cities of Carmichael and Citrus Heights -- both started as colony settlements.

By Linda Johnson, Archivist



California Digital Archives



Visit the California Digital Archives to view our most recent online exhibit, "California Goes to War: World War I and the Golden State." New material is being added regularly!

www.sos.ca.gov/archives/california-digital-archives/

Sneak Peek

October is Archives Month and we have a number of events in the works. Here is a sneak peek at some of the events we have planned:

Saturday, October 7: "It Came from the Archives!?" [7th Annual Sacramento Archives Crawl](#)

Tuesday, October 10: [Digital Archives Day](#)

Tuesday, October 17: [Preservation Workshop](#)

Thursday, October 19: [Friends of the California Archives Speaker Series](#)

Lynn Downey, former archivist and historian for the Levi Strauss Company. She will talk about the life and times of the "Man Who Gave Blue Jeans to the World."

Thursday, October 26: [Family History Month Guest Speaker](#)

A special Family History Month speaker event with Bill Cole. Bill is a master storyteller and writer and he will talk about how he has used the records at the California State Archives to unearth an intriguing family mystery.

Upcoming Events

June 30	Monthly Public Tour of the California State Archives	www.sos.ca.gov/archives/tours
July 28	Monthly Public Tour of the California State Archives	www.sos.ca.gov/archives/tours/
August 25	Monthly Public Tour of the California State Archives	www.sos.ca.gov/archives/tours/

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