

# Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park



## Our Mission

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**Discover the many states of California.™**

**Colonel Allensworth  
State Historic Park  
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*In 1908 a group of African Americans led by Colonel Allen Allensworth founded a town that would combine pride of ownership, equality of opportunity, and high ideals. Today California State Parks is committed to the town's renaissance as a living example of the American spirit.*



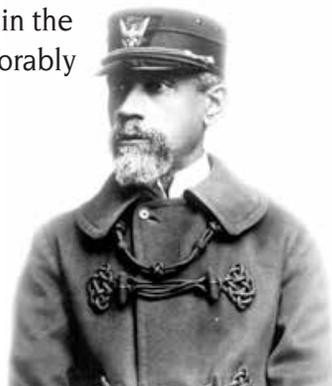
**I**n the southern San Joaquin Valley, a modest but growing assemblage of restored and reconstructed buildings marks the location of Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park. A schoolhouse, a Baptist church, businesses, homes, a hotel, a library, and various other structures symbolize the rebirth of one man's dream of an independent, democratic town where African Americans could live in control of their own destiny.

On the horizon stretch level farmlands, county roads, and the seemingly endless tracks of the Santa Fe rail line. In this part of the valley, summer temperatures can reach 100 degrees or more, but winters are generally mild.

### ALLEN ALLENSWORTH—A VISIONARY

Colonel Allen Allensworth—Army chaplain, educator, orator and town founder—was born into slavery in Louisville, Kentucky on April 7, 1842. Intelligent and eager for knowledge, he was encouraged by his mother to learn to read and write by playing school with the master's son. At 12 he was sent away for violating the law that prohibited the education of slaves. In 1862 he fled slavery to join the Union Navy and was honorably discharged as a chief petty officer.

After the Civil War, the Colonel achieved the formal education he had been denied. In 1877 he married Josephine Leavell, a schoolteacher, music teacher and gifted musician, and they



Colonel Allen Allensworth,  
ca. 1895 - 1914

raised two daughters. In 1886, with a doctorate of theology, Allensworth became chaplain to the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry, one of the army's four African American regiments. He retired a lieutenant colonel in 1906—the first African American to attain such high rank.

### THE TOWN OF ALLENSWORTH

Retirement found the Colonel lecturing throughout the eastern and mid-western states promoting Booker T. Washington's philosophy of African American self-reliance. They both firmly believed that, through education and hard work, African Americans could rise above the effects of slavery, attain greater social stature, and more fully realize their potential as a people.

The Allensworths settled in Los Angeles, and in 1906 the Colonel met Professor William Payne, an educator whose family had recently moved to Pasadena. With a mutual desire to live in an environment where Blacks could live free from discrimination, they merged their values with those of other pioneers of like mind to establish an independent, self-sufficient colony. They formed the California Colony and Home Promotion Association in 1908 and purchased 800 acres along the Santa Fe rail line from the Pacific Farming Company, at a railway stop called Solita. In 1909 the colony of Allensworth began to rise from the flat countryside—the first town in California founded, financed and



First Baptist Church  
(restored)



governed by Black Americans.

The name and reputation of Colonel Allensworth inspired African Americans who were looking for a better life. People from all over the country, including many who were already settled in California, came to populate the town. In some cases, people who never lived in the town purchased property sight-unseen to help

the cause. The town of Allensworth enjoyed great success and was the focus of considerable interest. On July 29, 1909, the *Tulare County Times* ran an article headlined, "Negro Colony at Solita Prosperous." Other newspapers described Allensworth with such headlines as, "Allensworth Folks Great Readers" (*Visalia Delta*) and "An Ideal Negro Settlement" (*Los Angeles Times*).

By 1910 residents had built a small school. Two years later Allensworth became California's first African American school district, and in 1914 the town became a judicial district. When rapid growth necessitated the construction of a larger school, Mrs. Allensworth turned the old school building into the Mary Dickinson Memorial Library in honor of her mother. Reflecting his



Allensworth school children,  
ca. 1911



*Allensworth Elementary School (restored)*



love for education and his desire to share it with others, Colonel Allensworth donated his extensive private book collection to the library. Later, Tulare County made the library part of its free system and supplied it with 50 books per month.

### **WATER**

Soon after settlement began, it became obvious that water would be a problem. In 1913 residents formed the Allensworth Rural Water Company and took control of the water system from Pacific Farming Company. Unable to raise the funds necessary to drill more wells or improve their existing system, Allensworth had a seriously lowered water table by 1914.

### **THE DECLINE**

1914 was a difficult year for the town. When the Santa Fe Railroad moved its rail stop from Allensworth to Alpaugh that July, much of Allensworth's economic base was lost. On September 15, 1914, the town

suffered its most significant setback—the tragic death of their inspirational leader. Colonel Allensworth was in Monrovia, California, preparing to preach at a small church. As he crossed a street, he was struck by two men on a motorcycle. After the Colonel's death, the struggle to survive became more difficult. Drought, poor crop yields and a failing water supply became hopeless obstacles. When an economic slump followed World War I, residents left in search of a better living. The town's decline gathered momentum. In the 1960s, after arsenic was found in the water supply, Allensworth was scheduled for demolition. By 1973 it no longer appeared on the California map.

### **A TOWN REVIVED**

However, the dream of Colonel Allensworth was not dead. The spark has been rekindled by a group of dedicated individuals—including some former residents—who continue to advocate for the growth and development of this vital cultural resource.

Events scheduled throughout the year bring the town to life and inspire a new interest in returning Allensworth to its glory days as a vibrant, successful town. About 70,000 visitors come annually from all over California and from out of state to experience this unique and historically important town.



*Park docents in period dress*

### **ACCESSIBLE FEATURES**

- Most park buildings using entry ramps
- Exhibits throughout the park
- A shuttle bus to buildings during special events
- Two campsites at the John L. Whitehead, Jr. Campground
- The combination restroom in the campground (may need assistance with the door or the water faucet)
- Drinking fountain at the combination restroom building



*Special event participants*

Accessibility is continually improving. For updates, visit <http://access.parks.ca.gov> or call the park.

### **SPECIAL EVENTS** (Call for dates.)

#### **Rededication**

An annual opportunity for park users and supporters to renew their commitment to the park and its symbolic representation of

African American self-determination.

#### **Old Time Jubilee**

Every year, following the harvest, the town of Allensworth had a big party—this is the time of year when the carnival came to town. The Old Time Jubilee recreates this festive atmosphere.

# Colonel Allensworth

## State Historic Park

### Legend

-  Highway
-  Street
-  Unpaved Path
-  Rail Line
-  Building
-  Historic Building
-  Historic Building Site
-  Campground
-  Locked Gate
-  Parking
-  Picnic Site
-  Restrooms
-  Showers

The park is ten miles southwest of Earlimart on County Road J22. From Highway 99, take County Road J22 west to Highway 43 south and turn into the park at Palmer Avenue.



John L. Whitehead Jr Campground

Campsites 1-15

Mary Dickinson Memorial Library

Special Event Parking

Paved Area

Visitor Center

Day Use Area

Allensworth Elementary School

Young Rd

Palmer Ave

Scott and Grosse Drug Store

Douglas Ave

Stowe Ave

First Baptist Church

Sojourna Ave

Allensworth Hotel

Bickers General Store

Overr Agricultural Demonstration Area

Palmer Ave

Milner House and Barbershop

Smith House

Stockett House

Hackett House and Barn

Dotson Barn

Blacksmith Area

Dotson House and Restaurant

Phillips House

Allensworth House

Ashby House, Dairy Barn and Milkhouse

Carter House

Carter Livery

Hindsman Co. General Store

Singleton General Store and Post Office

Hindsman House

Howard House

Johnson Bakery

A.T. & S.F. Stationmaster's Office

RR Ticket Office

## COL. ALLENSWORTH STATE HISTORIC PARK

This park is supported in part through a nonprofit organization. For more information, contact Friends of Allensworth • Star Route 1, Box 148 • Earlimart, California 93219 (661) 849-3433 • friendsforallensworth.com

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Avenue 39