

Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park Interpretation Master Plan Preliminary Draft Current as of 5/01/14



Note: This preliminary draft of the Interpretation Master Plan is for personal review and comments only. This draft is not intended for publication. The BMSHP Interpretation Master Plan is considered a working document until it has been approved by the pertinent California State Park authorities. Please do not distribute this document on your own. Please forward interested parties to Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park for additional copies, via the contact information listed below.

This document is intended for public feedback and input. Please direct comments to Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park staff:

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By mail or in person: At the Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park Visitor Center, at 525 Esplanade, Chico, CA 95926. (Please note the Visitor Center is only open Saturdays, Sundays, and Mondays. To arrange a time to meet with staff outside of those days please contact BMSHP staff member by the methods listed above)

Executive Summary

Agency

State of California, Department of Parks and Recreation, Northern Buttes District, Valley Sector, Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park.

Project Title

Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park Interpretation Master Plan

Project Description

The Interpretation Master Plan (IMP) is developed through the teamwork of California State Parks' staff, management, resource specialists, and stakeholders. The IMP serves as a long-term blueprint for interpretation and education within the park unit. The IMP builds on previous planning documents, and defines the goals, objectives, and strategies that provide a comprehensive interpretive vision for the park.

Planning Process

The Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park Interpretation Master Plan was produced with Proposition 84 bond funds allocated in May 2013. During the one year planning process staff and volunteers conducted stakeholder workshops, visitor surveys and identified gaps in interpretive services. Extensive research was conducted including consultation with subject-matter experts in the drafting of the IMP. Analysis of the information gathered by the team served as a basis for the Recommendations and IAP proposals.

The Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park Interpretation Master Plan was produced with Proposition 84 bond funds allocated in May 2013. Over the course of the following year, the planning team assembled interpretive materials, conducted research, met with subject matter experts, defined the park's significant resources, surveyed visitors, and conducted stakeholder workshops. Next they described and analyzed the current status of interpretation at the park. All of these pieces were then used together to draft recommendations and create an overall plan.

Project Findings

Analysis of the current status of interpretation identified several issues. There is a great need for consistency, continuity, improvement, and updating regarding programs, staffing, procedures, and administrative systems in order to ensure

interpretive readiness. The visitor experience is relatively good, but there is a great deal of room for improvement. Visitor communication, marketing, and orientation especially need improvement. Furthermore, there is a want for more variety in interpretive offerings and improved follow-up opportunities. There are many potential park visitors who go un-served every year, and the park needs to find ways of expanding and increasing its audience. The mansion can begin meeting these needs by improving organization, updating materials, and taking a more intentional, focused approach to interpretation. Utilization of new technology has a high potential for improving interpretive readiness, both personal and non-personal interpretation, visitor orientation, and visitor follow up. Overall, current interpretation is successful, but could be significantly expanded and improved by utilizing a greater variety of interpretive platforms and increased interpretation focusing on the park's secondary themes. Non-personal interpretation is particularly vital in meeting the future needs of the park, and, therefore, requires significant improvement.

The "Recommendations" section presents solutions for improving, enhancing, and expanding interpretive services and operations at BMSHP. These are stated in the form of Goals, Objectives, Strategies, and Tasks. Together, these elements provide a roadmap that will guide the development of future interpretive programs and services. Department staff, volunteers, and community partners should use this plan as a tool as they work together to achieve BMSHP's mission and vision of interpretation.

Five broad categories and associated goals have been identified.

Goal 1 - Visitors - The focus of interpretation will remain on visitors and their experience.

Goal 2 - Partnership - BMSHP will foster beneficial and collaborative relationships with organizations and with the community at large.

Goal 3 - Operations - BMSHP will put in place structures and procedures that will maintain readiness for interpretation at the park.

Goal 4 - Connection, Inspiration and Stewardship - Interpretation will connect visitors to the park's important cultural, natural and recreational resources and will foster a sense of inspiration and stewardship.

Goal 5 - Expand and Diversify - BMSHP will offer a variety of interpretive opportunities for a diversity of audiences.

Acknowledgements

The creation of an Interpretation Master Plan (IMP) for Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park (BMSHP) has been an objective of the Northern Buttes District for many years. This plan could not have been accomplished without the support of Eduardo (Eddie) Guaracha, District Superintendent. It also would not have been possible without the participation of many groups and individuals, both inside and outside the Department.

First we would like to acknowledge Denise Rist, Valley Sector Superintendent I, who had the foresight and dedication to write the proposal that allowed the IMP to be funded with Proposition 84 bonds. This document could not have been produced without that funding.

The multi-talented staff at BMSHP dedicated themselves to the research and production of the IMP, working diligently over the course of a year. They include: Raeann Bossarte, Interpreter I; Erica Martin, Park Interpretive Specialist; Blair Pubols, Park Interpretive Specialist; Michael Rosen-Molina, Park Interpretive Specialist; Leana Thompson, Park Interpretive Specialist; and Sondra Murphy, Park Aid. Gretchen Vandewalle, interpretive volunteer, dedicated many hours participating with the planning team and provided the valuable perspective of a volunteer to the discussion. Zachary Stark, Park Interpretive Specialist, helped with reviewing the document.

Jim Dempsey, Northern Buttes District Environmental Scientist, assisted with the information found in the Natural Resources section. Wes Dempsey, CSUC professor emeritus of biology, also assisted in this area and helped greatly in clarifying the history of the various tree labels throughout the park.

Drafting an IMP in a community effort and could not have been accomplished without the continued encouragement, support, and participation of the Bidwell Mansion Association (BMA). Their long relationship with the park, understanding of our programs, and involvement in our meetings made them an integral part in the creation of this document.

The Bidwell Mansion Community Project (BMCP) also provided input throughout the drafting process. Their members' attendance at both community meetings and their pertinent feedback helped make this a comprehensive approach to interpretation.

A special "thank you" is given to the Mechoopda Indian Tribe of Chico Rancheria, whose council and elders reviewed and commented on the Cultural Resources section of the IMP. The Mechoopda connection is crucial to the history of the BMSHP and the IMP outlines a desire to increase our interpretation of their history.

BMSHP is uniquely situated close to California State University, Chico (CSUC). The relationship of CSUC staff and students with the Bidwell Mansion staff is of great value to the park. We appreciate the time taken by Michael Magliari and Keith Johnson in participating in the review of the document and providing vital feedback. Students from CSUC participated in our second community meeting, and their ideas and perspectives were greatly valued.

Danny Keys gave us valuable insight and constructive suggestions regarding more effective and diverse interpretation for persons with disabilities. His offer to help us and examine our interpretation is much appreciated.

The IMP has also benefitted from a wide range of personal support and feedback from members of the community. Individuals helped in a variety of ways - from attending our stakeholder meetings, to offering a helpful suggestion or two, to reading over the entire draft and sending it back with comments and suggestions. Thank you, to the wonderful community members who took time to assist us in this process.

1 Introduction

Park Overview

Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park (BMSHP) exists to memorialize John and Annie Bidwell for their important contributions to the social, cultural, and economic heritage of California, by making available their historic home and interpreting the world in which they lived. Located roughly ninety miles north of Sacramento in Butte County, BMSHP sits in the heart of the city of Chico on approximately five acres of land adjacent to both downtown Chico and California State University, Chico.

Bidwell Mansion, the beautiful three-story historic home of John and Annie Bidwell, stands as the park's primary feature. Completed in 1868, the luxurious mansion would have been one of the most elaborate and modern houses of its time in northern California, reflecting the status and influence of these two important Californians. Today it represents one of the finest examples of early Victorian-era architecture still standing in California. Restored to the 1868-1900 historic period, the mansion is now operated by California State Parks (CSP) as a house museum which stands as a memorial to the legacy of the Bidwells. Other important park features include the many historic trees dotting the grounds, a modern Visitor Center with interpretive displays, and a rebuilt carriage shed housing several original Bidwell vehicles.

Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park makes up only a small portion of John Bidwell's original land holdings. At one time John Bidwell owned over 30,000 adjoining acres of land.¹ Annie sold off large sections of the rancho following John's death in 1900. In 1914 Annie Bidwell donated 24.72 acres, including the mansion, to the College Board of the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America to be used as a co-educational Christian school after her death.² Soon after Annie's death in 1918, the Presbyterian Church determined it would not be cost effective to establish and upkeep the mansion as a school and in 1922 sold the mansion and 10.21 acres for \$10,000 to be used as a dormitory for the then Chico State Teachers College.³

Chico State Teachers College (which became Chico State College in 1936 and then California State University, Chico in 1972) used the mansion as dormitories through

¹ Michael J. Gillis and Michael F. Magliari, *John Bidwell & California: The Life & Writings of a Pioneer 1841-1900* (Spokane: Arthur H. Clark Company, 2004), 130.

² *Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park Unit History*, Various Authors (1980-2001), 1914. The *Unit History* is a compilation of internal records kept by State Park staff from 1980-2001. It records day-to-day events at the park and staff research into Bidwell related history.

³ *BMSHP Unit History*.

1934. From 1935 until its transfer to California State Parks, the school used the home for classrooms, offices, and social functions. Beginning in the early 1950's, civic groups started a focused lobbying effort for the transfer of the Bidwell Mansion property from Chico State College to the Division of Beaches and Parks. After eleven dedicated years, the Bidwell Mansion officially became part of the Division of Beaches and Parks, now known as the Department of Parks and Recreation.⁴ In March 1964, the department classified the unit as Bidwell Mansion State Historic Monument and held dedication ceremonies on May 7, 1966. In May 1970 CSP dropped the term "Monument" from general usage and all historical units, except for Hearst San Simeon, became classified as State Historic Parks. In 1972 Bidwell Mansion was placed on the National Register of Historic Places, and Rancho del Arroyo Chico and the Bidwell Adobe are also listed as California Historical Landmark #329.⁵

Following John Bidwell's death in 1900, beginning with Annie Bidwell and continuing throughout ownership by the college and CSP, Bidwell Mansion underwent many changes and additions. Originally, CSP used the rear section of the home as well as a post-1900 addition on the north side for visitor orientation, museum displays, bathrooms, and staff areas. These uses transferred to the modern Visitor Center located to the north of the mansion upon its opening in 1993. Renovation of the mansion started in 1997 with the removal of the post-1900 addition. Between 1997 and 2010 the kitchen, dining room, and staff quarters were all restored according to the 1865 Bidwell Mansion blueprints.⁶

The innovative spirit of the Bidwells permeates California's cultural landscape, and Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park stands as a tangible link to the history and legacy of these extraordinary individuals. Visitors touring Bidwell Mansion feel connected to the stories of John organizing the Bidwell-Bartleson party to California in 1841, finding gold on the Feather River in 1848, developing the local area, and falling in love with Annie in the 1860's. Guests walking the grounds are amazed by the historic trees from all over the world and appreciate the many agricultural contributions of John Bidwell. Visitors reading the exhibits in the Visitor Center gain perspective, maybe for the first time, on the unique relationship the Bidwells maintained with the local Mechoopda Maidu tribe. These stories give BMSHP value and meaning, and the park's interpretive resources act as mediums through which visitors can connect with this important history.

⁴ Instrument of Transfer recorded Vol. 1337, Records Office, Butte County, CA, 472.

⁵ *Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park General Plan*, (1984), 16.

⁶ *BMSHP Unit History*.

Plan Purpose

The California State Parks Interpretation Master Plan (IMP) is a long-range interpretive plan that builds on past planning documents and provides a unified interpretive vision for the park. It is intended to guide the development and delivery of the interpretive programs and services at BMSHP. The plan will guide the park's development of interpretive facilities, exhibits, signage, educational programs, and recreational opportunities. This document is intended to be viable for up to twenty years and should be reviewed and updated as necessary every five years.

Currently, CSP staff and volunteers at BMSHP provide various interpretive tours, events, and school programs year round. However, need exists for a more coordinated and encompassing approach, more community involvement and outreach, an expansion of the Volunteers in Parks (V.I.P) program, and an updating of school programs to better fit the current curriculum standards for California.

Park staff have undertaken the writing of this IMP thanks to the availability of Proposition 84 funds.

Planning Process

The process of drafting the BMSHP Interpretation Master Plan began in May 2013 when Proposition 84 bonds were allocated for funding the project. While producing the document over the next year, the planning team assembled interpretive materials, conducted research, consulted with subject-matter experts, and solicited community input. The first stakeholder meeting was held in August 2013, and helped set the stage for the bulk of the drafting process. At this meeting, the stakeholder group identified ideas and needs regarding interpretation and education, facility use, special events, community outreach, and revenue generation. Additional information was gathered through a visitor survey, made available from August through November 2013. The team used this information, along with internally conducted research and analysis, to create an initial draft of the document. This preliminary draft was presented to the public at a second stakeholder meeting held in February 2014. Participants at this meeting moved among different stations where they reviewed the plan's goals, objectives, strategies, and tasks. They wrote down their initial feedback, and were encouraged to take a draft home with them in order to review and provide feedback on the entire document. From this round of feedback, in May 2014 a second draft was completed and released for another round of public review.

Planning Team

The core of the planning team consisted of BMSHP staff and volunteers including Denise Rist, Valley Sector Superintendent; Raeann Bossarte, Interpreter 1; Blair Pubols, Park Interpretive Specialist; Erica Martin, Park Interpretive Specialist; Leana Thompson, Park Interpretive Specialist; Michael Rosen-Molina, Park Interpretive Specialist; Sondra Murphy, Park Aid, and Gretchen Vandewalle, interpretive volunteer. Background research and writing was produced in-house due to the education, qualifications and experience of the staff and volunteers. The planning team process also included input and communications with the Bidwell Mansion Association board members and other interested individuals. BMSHP is a unique park in that California State University, Chico is in our backyard. This proximity has produced many long-standing associations with local and Bidwell Mansion history writers, CSUC professors and staff, and subject-matter experts. The local Mechoopda Maidu tribal office is a few miles from the park and consultation with the tribe was essential to writing the cultural section of this document. All of these resources were used to guide the core planning team.

Park Planning History

This IMP builds upon and updates several previous CSP planning documents. Formal planning documents that pertain to interpretation at BMSHP include:

Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park General Plan (1984)

The General Plan is the primary management document for each unit in the California State Park system, defining a park's primary purpose and establishing a management direction for its future development and operation. By providing a clear purpose and vision, long and short-term goals, and proper guidelines, the general plan defines the broadest management framework possible for a unit's development, on-going management, interpretive programming, and public use.

Pertaining to interpretation, the General Plan states:

"Interpretation will play a major role in presenting the early history of Bidwell's Rancho Chico, and the people and events associated with the flow of history related to the unit's purpose."

The document goes on to establish resource management policies, primary and secondary themes, and the interpretive period. It also makes interpretive suggestions including recommendations for the restoration of historic structures and the building of a Visitor Center.

The BMSHP General Plan will be thirty years old in 2014. While certain aspects remain relevant, the information on park interpretation needs updating, clarification, and expansion in order to be more useful in the planning of interpretive programs. Certain sections, like the recommendation for a new visitor center, need updating. Changes in visitor expectations, staff resources, technology, and information necessitate an update via an IMP.

Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park Interpretive Plan (1974)

This document lays out broad information for the development of interpretive programs and material at BMSHP. It is extremely similar to the interpretive prospectus and appears to have been superseded by it.

Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park Interpretive Prospectus (1977)

The Interpretive Prospectus is a provisional document that contains the same interpretation information as the General Plan and evaluates existing conditions for interpretation in the park unit. An Interpretive Prospectus may be developed when no approved General Plan exists or the approved General Plan does not contain sufficient detail to adequately guide the development of interpretive services for a unit.

Written in 1977, the BMSHP Interpretive Prospectus details the unit's interpretive time periods, themes, and current and proposed interpretive services. The document's interpretive material requires updating, clarification, and expansion based on changes in park conditions and interpretive methods.

Interpretive Plan: Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park Visitor Center (1990)

This document outlines broad goals and plans for the, then, proposed Visitor Center. This plan discusses possible interpretive themes, proposed media, a suggested exhibit floor plan, possible artifacts to be displayed, and resource material relevant to each theme. While there are distinct variations from this plan, the current Visitor Center still reflects its broad outlines. This plan and the information in it remain helpful and relevant for future interpretive designs.

Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park Visitor Center Exhibit Text (1992)

This document takes the proposed themes and broad outline laid out in the Visitor Center Plan and creates specific text for the exhibits. Most of the sections written here appear verbatim in the current Visitor Center Exhibits. Several panels for which text had been written do not exist in the current Visitor Center.

Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park Historic Landscape Report (2002)

The Historic Landscape Report lays out existing evidence regarding the design of the mansion grounds during the Bidwells' time and aids in the rehabilitation of the landscape to match this period. This process includes a discussion of historical sources of information regarding the grounds, an inventory of historic trees and plants grown on the property, and recommendations on how to accurately recreate the historic scene.

Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park Scope of Collections Statements (2013)

The Scope of Collections Statement describes the current status and future plans for long-term management of the park unit's museum objects. BMSHP recently updated this document to better define relevant interpretive periods and types of materials collected.

Resource Management Plan (n.d.)

Written sometime after the Interpretive Prospectus, the Resource Management Plan defines broad management guidelines for restoration, archeology, natural resources, interpretation, recreational factors, and operation for the park unit. Pertinent information in this document also exists in both the Interpretive Prospectus and the General Plan.

Related Documents

Other documents relating to the planning, design, and delivery of interpretive services at BMSHP include the following:

- All Visitors Welcome: Accessibility in State Park Interpretive Programs and Facilities

- Aiming for Excellence

- Basic Interpretation Learning System, 2004

- Department Administrative Manual

- Department Operations Manual

2 Park Resources

Interpretive Significance

Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park's significance stretches back to the time of the Bidwells. Contemporaries recognized and celebrated John and Annie Bidwell, Rancho Chico, and their impressive home. After their deaths, their legacies continued and public veneration grew. The establishment of BMSHP in 1964 formally acknowledged this public respect for the Bidwells and their important role in California's history. Since then, BMSHP has preserved the Bidwells' home and grounds, and has shared their story with tens of thousands of visitors every year.

Today, the historic Bidwell Mansion and surrounding grounds remain the park's primary features. At its height, John Bidwell's Rancho del Arroyo Chico stretched over 30,000 acres and witnessed the unfolding of so much of California's history. BMSHP preserves the last remnants of this important setting and makes them available to the public. The restored mansion allows visitors to step back in time to the late 19th Century, where they learn the stories that define early California. On the grounds, in the presence of historic Bidwell trees, they can relax, marvel, and reflect on the development of California from its natural state, to an agriculture breadbasket, and finally to a modern urban living space. BMSHP acts as a stage, on which the story of John and Annie Bidwell can be told.

These stories are the park's most important resources. While the park features have important intrinsic value, ultimately they serve as mediums through which the public can learn about John and Annie Bidwell. As they can nowhere else, visitors encounter the stories of these amazing California figures and of the world they lived in and helped shape. It is impossible to tell a complete story of early California without the Bidwells. John Bidwell, in particular, is important for his impact on so much of California's development. It has been noted that "of all the American pioneers who settled in California before the Gold Rush, none enjoyed more subsequent fame and success than John Bidwell, and none made as great a contribution to the state's economic, political, and cultural development during the late Nineteenth Century."⁷ Simply put, no other figure can match the breadth and length of John Bidwell's influence on California's growth. Annie Bidwell became an important inspiration and partner in these endeavors, as well as becoming an important historical figure in her

⁷ Gillis and Magliari, 19.

own right. Together, the Bidwells played a key role in the making of modern California and their legacies remain to this day.

The story of the Bidwells connects to so many different topics and different CSP units. It tells of the opening of California to the United States, the Gold Rush, the establishment of state government, the development of California's agricultural empire, the fate of California's Native Americans, and the evolution of culture and society in the region. While many other parks tell these various stories and discuss John and Annie in relation to their particular story, no other park focuses on the Bidwells specifically and ties all the stories together. The Bidwells act as a common thread linking stories of California's prehistory to the turn of the 20th Century, and no place is better suited to tell that thread than BMSHP. The park honors their legacies, which permeate to the present day, and makes them accessible to the public.

Natural Resources

Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park is uniquely situated for natural resource interpretation. The park's proximity to significant agricultural regions, current on-site natural features, and the rich history of the Bidwells all provide ample resources and opportunities for interpretation. This section describes the general natural setting of the park, highlights its important features, and explores the many human changes to the immediate environment that have taken place over time.

General Geographic Sketch

BMSHP lies in the northern portion of California's Great Central Valley. The valley is a great depression filled with sedimentary deposits of past geologic time and flanked on both sides by mountain ranges. The rich soil makes this an incredibly productive area, well watered by numerous rivers and creeks. A Mediterranean climate characterizes the region, with cool, wet winters and hot, dry summers. About 30 inches of precipitation falls annually, with the majority of rain coming between November and March. No rain typically falls during the summer months and temperatures can rise to above 100 degrees Fahrenheit.

BMSHP sits within the city limits of Chico and the downtown area lies to the immediate south of the unit, across Big Chico Creek. The Creek forms the southern boundary of the property and is a primary feature of the park and of the surrounding area. Big Chico Creek originates in the Sierra Nevada Mountains near Butte Meadows and flows through Bidwell Park and Chico before emptying into the Sacramento River about six miles west of BMSHP. The park unit lies within the historic floodplain of the creek, however, water diversions about five miles upstream of the unit currently divert heavy flows into Sycamore Creek and Lindo Channel, removing serious threat of

flooding. Successive geologic deposits of sediment from Big Chico Creek created an extensive alluvial fan known as the Chico Fan, on which BMSHP sits. The soil of this unit is alluvial material known as Vina Loam with moderate permeability and little to no hazard of soil erosion. The park rests at an elevation of 59 meters (195 feet) and, except for a portion where Big Chico Creek has deeply bisected the alluvial plain, the topography of the unit maintains a nearly level slope of less than 2%.

The Natural Environment before Contact

For many centuries before the arrival of Euro-Americans in the mid-1800s, the Chico area maintained a rich variety of flora and fauna. In its pristine state, oak woodland-savanna and riparian forests characterized the region. Tall grasslands provided food and cover for small fur-bearers, birds, and reptiles. Large expanses of marshes, riverlands, and floodplains gave refuge to thousands of migrating waterfowl and provided nesting sites for many birds. Large oaks punctuated the landscape, providing food and shelter for larger mammals like elk, pronghorns, and deer. The mild climate in the valley made it an ideal wintering ground for many higher altitude species.

Upon seeing the Chico area for the first time in 1843, John Bidwell provided the following description of the land in its pristine state:

“Hastening on up the valley we struck the trail of the Oregon company on what is now known as Chico Creek, Rancho Chico, and to me one of the loveliest of places. The plains were covered with scattered groves of spreading oaks; there were wild grasses and clover, two, three and four feet high, and most luxuriant. The fertility of the soil was beyond question, and the waters of Chico Creek were clear, cold, and sparkling; the mountains were lovely and flower-covered, a beautiful scene.”⁸

The local Native American groups also played an important role in this environment. Indian villagers hunted local fauna, relied on native plants, and intentionally affected the local environment for their benefit. In all, the local Native Americans acted as a relatively stable and vital part of the local ecosystem.⁹

The Natural Environment after the Arrival of Euro Americans

The local landscape irreparably changed following the arrival of Euro-Americans in the 1840s and the subsequent discovery of rich agricultural lands and gold-bearing streams. Since that time, an extensive agricultural system has almost entirely replaced the Sacramento Valley’s native ecosystems, including those of Chico and the

⁸ Gillis and Magliari, 94-95.

⁹ See “Cultural Resources” section for more in depth information on the local Native Americans.

surrounding area. Therefore, the BMSHP property can be viewed as an example of an artificial landscape which has, for the most part, supplanted the original.

The Vina Loam soil in concert with the Mediterranean climate and immediate access to water make the area extremely suitable for agricultural purposes. John Bidwell identified himself first and foremost as a farmer, therefore, the flora during the Bidwells' occupation of the grounds consisted principally of exotic plants, both agricultural and ornamental. Beginning with the establishment of Rancho Chico in 1849, John Bidwell began introducing new agricultural crops to the region. Wheat quickly became the dominant staple grown throughout the valley and remained so until the turn of the century. However, in contrast to the majority of farms in California, Bidwell made diversification of agriculture a primary feature of Rancho Chico. Among the many crops grown on the ranch, Bidwell introduced new and experimental species such as the Casaba Melon and Egyptian Corn, and also pioneered later staples of California agriculture, including almonds and walnuts. In total, Bidwell grew hundreds of different types of crops, and for nearly six decades Rancho Chico remained one of the most important agricultural operations in California.¹⁰

Both the Bidwells also heavily involved themselves in ornamental planting, and the grounds and gardens surrounding Bidwell Mansion reflected their love of nature and their particular environmental philosophy. The Bidwells associated with a unique and particular form of conservation referred to as "environmental reform" or "environmental renovation." While they believed that nature had intrinsic value and should be protected, they thought human influence could and should improve nature. The Bidwells, and many others of their time, "dreamed of transforming California's wheat fields and rangelands into a lush, man-made Garden of Eden that would be both profitable and beautiful. This they proposed to accomplish through their enthusiastic promotion of irrigation, horticulture, and aggressive afforestation. Consequently the liberal planting of exotic eucalyptus and other decorative trees, shrubs, and flowers became almost as important to [the Bidwells] as the nurturing of his many commercial crops."¹¹ A foreign observer described the ranch by saying:

"...not even the all-powerful American dollar would be able to bring about the destruction of a favorite oak, an avenue, or a bit of charming scenery. Not only have the natural beauties of the country been preserved, but heaps of gold derived from its productiveness have been expended upon developing and increasing the pleasing appearance of the estate. The property of 25,000 acres is like a group of delightful

¹⁰ See Appendix for a partial list of crops, shrubs, and trees planted by Bidwell.

¹¹ Gillis and Magliari, 145.

parks, and one drives for hours in every direction along charming avenues... without ever losing the sense of rural beauty.”¹²

Together, the Bidwells oversaw the planting of an extensive garden surrounding the mansion, which included hydrangea, verbena, yellow jasmine, lily, rose, as well as numerous other native and introduced plant species.¹³ They planted specimen trees from around the world throughout the grounds, some of which survive up to the present day. Over the course of the Bidwells’ lifetime, ornamental plantings replaced most of the original native landscape and created a legacy that permeates throughout BMSHP and the city of Chico today.

The local fauna also underwent significant change following the establishment of Rancho Chico. Increased hunting and loss of habitat led to a significant reduction in local animal populations and their relative replacement by non-native species. As part of his agricultural endeavors, Bidwell introduced cattle, horses, sheep, and pigs onto the grounds. Some native species did remain in the area, such as salmon and other fish, birds, rabbits, and squirrels. Interestingly, several sources confirm the existence of a fenced-in park to the mansion’s rear that contained several tame deer.

The Park Today

Following the death of John Bidwell, the grounds surrounding the Bidwell Mansion continued the transition from their pristine state, to agricultural utilization, and eventually to ornamental and residential use. The expansion of the Chico urban area enveloped Rancho Chico and now only scattered remnants remain. Today, CSP maintains the BMSHP grounds as an urban park. Most of the land is vegetated with specimen trees, including several historic trees dating back to the Bidwells’ time. These include the Ginkgo, Southern Magnolia, Tulip tree, and Monkey Puzzle tree, which are favorites of guests and staff alike. Several trees have come down since the establishment of BMSHP, either from natural causes or intentionally under CSP direction. New trees have been planted to replace those that have fallen or been removed in order to restore the grounds to its historic state.

Shrubs, plants, and trees have also been planted around the mansion in order to replicate the ornamental nature maintained around the home during the Bidwells’ lifetime. Certain aspects, such as the hydrangeas planted around the house, are based on historical sources, while other features, like a rose garden on the south side of the home, are not historic but maintained in the spirit of the Bidwells.

¹² Thomas K. Dow, in Gillis and Magliari, 145.

¹³ Royston Hanamoto Alley and Abbey, *Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park: Historic Landscape Report* (2002), 4-8.

The southern boundary of the unit includes the banks of Big Chico Creek. The creek continues to flow year-round and although this area has gone through extensive ecological changes, some native plants still exist in a narrow riparian zone near the creek. Native and naturalized alien plant species in this zone include oak, alder, cottonwood, maple, willow, sycamore, dogwood, and black walnut. California Black Walnut (*Juglans hindsii*) is included in the California Native Plant Society's Inventory of Rare and Endangered Plants.¹⁴

The urban setting in which BMSHP lies limits wildlife to those species capable of living in close association with civilization; squirrels are the most commonly seen mammal. The riparian vegetation along Big Chico Creek provides an important wildlife habitat, sheltering gray foxes, raccoons, feral cats, shrews, mice, moles, and rats occurring in this zone. Animal life that may be found in the creek includes crayfish, smallmouth bass, catfish, carp, steelhead, and salmon. A variety of birds occur in the unit including woodpeckers, robins, starlings, house sparrows, scrub jays, hawks, owls, and crows.

The natural world remains an important feature of Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park. Today, the park's natural features act as links to the past, sharing their stories with a modern public. The ornamental plantings, serene creek, and playful wildlife all help to tell the story of a landscape that has undergone an amazing change over the past 150 years. Although the original native setting has been almost entirely replaced, the trees, shrubs, gardens, and wildlife that currently make up the unit testify to the major changes that have shaped the landscape over time. These features, and the stories that tie them together, create a foundation for interpretation at the park. They provide an opportunity for the public to marvel, reflect, be inspired, and forge emotional and intellectual connections between the past and the present landscape.

Historical Sketch and Cultural Resources

Native American Period

The human influence in the area dates back to at least 10,000 BCE when the earliest humans migrated into the Great Central Valley of California. The oral tradition of the local Native Americans "does not include a story of migration, but rather makes reference to the beginnings of this world at a place known as Tadoiko, a few miles south of the village. It was here that a raft carrying Kodoyampeh (Earth Maker) and

¹⁴ "CNPS Inventory Plant Detail," last updated February 4, 2013, <http://www.rareplants.cnps.org/detail/938.html>.

Turtle first came ashore on the soft, newly created earth. A large depression was visible there for centuries until leveled for agriculture in the early 20th century.”¹⁵

The local Native Americans belong to the Penutian language family and have been further classified as the Northwestern Maidu,¹⁶ a subset of the larger Maidu tribal grouping. This arbitrary classification came later from American researchers based on relative linguistic and cultural similarities. The Native Americans would not have recognized these distinctions and identified themselves on much more local terms. The local Indians, “lack[ed]... any collective name in common use for themselves as a group or stock.”¹⁷ The Northwestern Maidu lived along the lower North, Middle and South Forks of the Feather River and along the Sacramento River near its confluence with Chico Creek. They were bounded to the north by the Yahi, to the east by the Northeastern, or Mountain, Maidu, to the south by the Nisenan, and to the west by the Wintun.¹⁸ Within this area there were dozens of village sites that were settled more or less permanently by the Maidu. A village would be occupied for a certain number of years and then abandoned for another site for a time and then sometimes reoccupied later. These villages formed the basis of identification and affiliation among the Indians.¹⁹ “The area owned by each community was very defined, and its exact limits were known and marked.”²⁰ For the most part these village communities did not travel much outside of their established territories. “This restriction of travel was in part due to the rugged nature of the ground, and in part to the hostility of the different villages toward each other.”²¹ This was also because each village did not need an extensive area in order to provide for its required subsistence needs.²² “As there was little or no overlap of territory, there was little warfare. Occasionally there might have been intervillage and intertribal enmities involving raiding and retaliation; more rarely there might have been battles when several villages combined forces against a common enemy. However, in their egalitarian society, there was little feeling of tribal loyalty.”²³

¹⁵ “Mechoopda Maidu Indians - History & Culture – The Mechoopda: A Historical Overview,” accessed on October 29, 2013, www.mechoopda-nsn.gov/history.

¹⁶ Northwestern Maidu can also be referred to as the Konkow Maidu. This name is avoided because it can also refer to a specific village site. If used, “Konkow” will refer to the village.

¹⁷ Roland B. Dixon, *The Northern Maidu* (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1905), 123.

¹⁸ Francis A. Riddell, “Maidu and Konkow,” in *Handbook of North American Indians*, ed. Robert F. Heizer (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), 370.

¹⁹ Dixon, 223; Dorothy Hill, *The Indians of Chico Rancheria* (Chico: Ka Ca Ma Press, 1978), 7-8.

²⁰ Dixon, 225.

²¹ Dixon, 201.

²² Hill, 2.

²³ Hill, 7.

“The population of a village could vary from a few families to many families, the total population thus ranging from ten or fifteen to a few hundred individuals.”²⁴ In general, the population of each village was small. Property ownership was both communal and individual. Personal items such as bows, baskets, clothing, and household goods were typically considered the property of the individual while land was considered communal property. An individual family could in some cases claim priority over a specific fishing hole, oak tree, or hunting ground, but any rights would have been based on use as opposed to exclusive owned property.²⁵ Each village would have had a chief. This was not a hereditary position and the chief would have been selected from one of the respected elder males in the village. The chief would be responsible for making important decisions for the tribe, settling disputes, and leading certain ceremonies. A chief could be stripped of this title if he lost favor with the members of the village.²⁶ The physical village would consist of several semi-subterranean houses. These structures were round, about twenty feet in diameter, and excavated several feet deep. They were constructed with tree limbs and covered with dirt and plants and were accessed through the roof. Each house would hold a family unit and possibly others. These homes were typically organized around a larger ceremonial roundhouse. This structure is referred to as a roundhouse, sweat house, or dance house. Other village features would have included numerous granaries for food storage, structures to provide shade while working outside, and a menstrual house.²⁷

The rich natural environment provided by the Sacramento Valley landscape allowed the Native Americans to survive by utilizing hunter-gatherer subsistence strategies. “In the Chico area it was unnecessary to travel a great distance to obtain a wide variety of food and other materials used domestically and ceremonially.”²⁸ Many distinct ecological environments could be found and utilized within a several mile radius of Maidu villages in the region, each with their own offerings in terms of foods and materials.²⁹ The Indians varied their subsistence strategies according to the season and what happened to be available.³⁰ The Native Americans relied on the acorn as a primary staple item of their diet. They ground the acorns into a mush, which provided a comparatively nutritional food source that required relatively minimal effort. The Indians would also hunt elk, deer, pronghorn, quail, and other birds. In addition to other fish, such as trout, the annual salmon runs provided an

²⁴ Hill, 7.

²⁵ Dixon, 224.

²⁶ Dixon, 223.

²⁷ “Mechoopda Maidu Indians – Mechoopda Culture, Traditional Life, and Society,” accessed on October 29, 2013, <http://www.mechoopda-nsn.gov/history/culture.asp>; Hill, 52-58; Dixon, 168-176.

²⁸ Hill, 2.

²⁹ Hill, 4-7.

³⁰ Hill, 7.

important food source.³¹ Grasshoppers were also collected and enjoyed by the Indians.³² “The variety of the [Maidu] diet was impressive, and protected them from single crop failures....”³³

Especially when compared to the later American occupation, the Native Americans maintained a relatively low impact and symbiotic relationship with the natural environment. Their subsistence practices and low population density prevented them from creating too heavy-handed of an impact on the ecosystem. Hunting practices would have helped keep wildlife populations in check and improved the overall genetic quality of a species by hunting the weaker members of a population. The Indians did intentionally alter the environment for their own benefit. This primarily consisted of periodic burnings of the underbrush in order to improve their ability to hunt game and to encourage growth of desired flora. However, even considering this, the Maidu can be considered a relatively stable part of their local ecosystem.

The day to day life of a Maidu villager revolved around these seasonal subsistence strategies. “The division of labor among the Maidu was such that the men did the hunting, fishing, and trapping; built the houses, particularly the semi-subterranean earth lodges; and made all weapons. The women did all the rest of the work - cooking, preparing hides and clothing, gathering roots and seeds, making baskets, etc.”³⁴ The local Maidu traded with neighboring groups for items like shell beads, pine nuts, and salmon in return for items like arrows, bows, deer hides, and food sources in local abundance.

Some of the most remarkable items produced by the local Maidu were their intricate baskets. “Basketry was both an art and a necessity”³⁵ Baskets were used for a variety of domestic purposes such as cooking, carrying objects, washing food, and catching animals. Some basketry was primarily ceremonial and created for annual burning ceremonies. The Maidu used willow and redbud to make the baskets and included intricate designs.³⁶

Marriage was a rather simple, but important, institution. The marriage process was initiated by the man who would provide a gift to the bride’s father. Consent of both parties was required in almost all cases. The couple lived for a time with the bride’s family before permanently settling in the groom’s village. While brides could come

³¹ Hill, 61-64.

³² Annie E.K. Bidwell, ed. Dorothy Hill, *Rancho Chico Indians* (1980, 1987), 55; Hill, 62-63; Dixon 190.

³³ “Mechoopda Maidu Indians – Mechoopda Culture, Traditional Life, and Society,” accessed on October 29, 2013, <http://www.mechoopda-nsn.gov/history/culture.asp>.

³⁴ Dixon, 227.

³⁵ Riddell, 376.

³⁶ Riddell, 377.

from either the same village or nearby villages, the relatively low village populations contributed to a greater degree of local exogamy as men had to look outside the village to find a suitable mate. Although most marriages were monogamous, a male was free to marry as many wives as he could support with no degree of distinction between his wives. Divorce was a relatively straight forward matter, with both parties simply agreeing to no longer live together and both free to remarry immediately.³⁷

The Maidu religious beliefs were similar to many other California Indians. Their religion lacked a clear organization and structure that those accustomed with western religions are familiar with. "Mechoopda oral literature is replete with myths recounting the origin of nearly every aspect of life in the world, including the establishment of culture. The creation of the first man and woman, the gift of the first food (acorn), and even the occurrence of the first death, provided orientation for navigating the endless pitfalls life in this world entails. Standing like ideological bookends, Kodoyampeh (Earth Maker) and Coyote expressed the dichotomous and often conflicting nature of life, their exploits recited in endless episodes of myth."³⁸ The world was occupied by mysterious powers and spirits living in various natural geographic sites.

Some of the most powerful figures in Maidu villages were the shamans. A shaman had been contacted by a specific animal spirit and was then brought up in the art of shamanism. The shaman, "with his mysterious powers and spiritual communication, provided a sense of unity among the village community."³⁹ The shaman performed various societal and spiritual roles and also served as a natural healer.⁴⁰

A primary tenant of Maidu culture was the *kuksu* cult. This male secret society is found in many tribes throughout northern California. According to Kroeber, "The secret society or *Kuksu* cult thus was followed by all or most of the members of eight stocks: the Yuki, Pomo, Wintun, Maidu, Miwok, Costanoan, Esselen, and Salinan, and by fragments of two others: Atbabascan and Yokuts. On a wider view, the cult thus appears to be essentially, as well as originally, a Penutian systematization."⁴¹ While the practice of the society was widespread, this should not suggest any greater degree of organization. "The society existed only in separate communities. Each communal society no doubt recognized the others as parallel and equal... The only

³⁷ Dixon, 239-241.

³⁸ "Mechoopda Maidu Indians – Mechoopda Culture, Traditional Life, and Society," accessed on October 29, 2013, <http://www.mechoopda-nsn.gov/history/culture.asp>.

³⁹ Riddell, 384.

⁴⁰ Riddell, 384.

⁴¹ Alfred L. Kroeber *Handbook of the Indians of California (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, 1925), 371.*

societies were those of the town units. They were not branches, because there was no parent stem.”⁴² The society functioned as a ceremonial and dance society. Besides being an essential puberty ritual, initiation of younger males was important for the transmission of tribal cultural knowledge. The village history, religion, and ceremonial procedures were passed on via this society.⁴³ In addition to this vital cultural function, the kuksu society performed a series of annual dances. “The kuksu cult had spirit impersonations and followed a dance cycle in which dances were representative of different spirits.”⁴⁴ These rituals were conducted in order to pass on cultural heritage, ensure favorable weather and food for the future, and maintain the cosmic balance.⁴⁵ A specific cycle of dances was practiced throughout the year. Some dances involved the entire tribe, while others only included members of the kuksu society. They took place in the ceremonial building and were extremely elaborate.

The Northwestern Maidu believed that when an individual died their spirit would travel to a secret cave in the Sutter Buttes, and after a time of reliving portions of their life they would ascend to another realm. Members of the village would bury the deceased in the ground with a large quantity of personal items and special memorial pieces specifically for the occasion. Women in the village would loudly wail in mourning of the deceased, often carrying on for several days. Sometime after the burial the village would hold a ceremonial burning in remembrance of the individuals who had passed away in the previous year. These burning ceremonies served an important cultural healing function and would involve the burning of decorative goods, such as baskets and headdresses, as well as more mundane items like domestic goods and clothes.⁴⁶

Mechoopda

Among the many village sites in the Chico area, the village of Mechoopda became the most significant to the area’s history. Historians have used the term “Mechoopda”, in its various spellings, to designate both a linguistic subset of the Northwestern Maidu as well as a particular village site. The original village site existed near Durham and Little Chico Creek with the village’s territory stretching on the east side of the Sacramento River up to the south bank of Chico Creek. This community probably consisted of about 20 homes, or approximately 150-175 people. The lives of the Mechoopda changed dramatically with the coming of the Euro-Americans, and the

⁴² Kroeber, 375.

⁴³ “Mechoopda Maidu Indians – Mechoopda Culture, Traditional Life, and Society,” accessed on October 29, 2013, <http://www.mechoopda-nsn.gov/history/culture.asp>.

⁴⁴ Riddell, 384.

⁴⁵ Riddell, 383-384.

⁴⁶ Hill, 48-52; Annie Bidwell, 32-35; Hill, 48-52; Dixon, 246.

tribe soon found their fate intertwined with that of one of these immigrants, John Bidwell.⁴⁷

Recreation Resources

Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park's beauty, intrinsic and historic value, and proximity to other areas of interest attract visitors to a variety of recreational opportunities. While guided tours of Bidwell Mansion are the most obvious recreational activity, visitors partake in numerous other pastimes while at the park. These activities include both intentional and incidental recreation, and occur in four zones throughout this small unit. These zones include Big Chico Creek and the surrounding riparian zone, the mansion grounds, the modern Visitor Center, and Bidwell Mansion itself.

The creek and riparian zone provide opportunities for nature viewing and relaxation. In the past, park staff have conducted gold panning programs in the creek, but have not conducted these programs in this area for some time. A reproduction metal bridge spans the creek and provides easy walking access to Children's Park and downtown Chico. Children's Park offers a variety of activities including a playground for young children, while downtown Chico has a variety of restaurants, shops, and entertainment venues. However, the proximity to these areas as well as the relative seclusion provided by the riparian growth make the creek area a spot often visited by transients and delinquents, and therefore limits its suitability for interpretive programs.

The mansion grounds provide the most variety of recreational opportunities. The beautiful trees, lawn, and setting adjacent to the mansion attract many people who then find opportunities for inspiration and relaxation. One picnic table provides a place to sit. Located under the Ginkgo tree, many guests use it to enjoy the park, while others choose to pick a spot on the lawn to relax or to enjoy a picnic, a conversation, reading, or informal play. University classes meet on the grounds to study the trees, history, and architecture associated with the park.

Many people use the setting for artistic endeavors. The beauty of the mansion and the trees make them favorite subjects for casual and professional photographers, both as the primary subject and as a background. Professionals often use the grounds as a location for wedding and quinceañera photos. Painters also use the grounds for their work and the park has hosted several plein air painting and other art events.

⁴⁷ "Mechoopda Maidu Indians – Mechoopda Culture, Traditional Life, and Society," accessed on October 29, 2013, <http://www.mechoopda-nsn.gov/history/culture.asp>; Hill, 16-17.

Weddings, birthday parties, and other gatherings take place on the grounds. Most of these events are organized and go through the CSP Special Event permitting process, while some smaller gatherings are more impromptu and happen without prior CSP knowledge or participation. The gazebo, lawn, and garden are the locations most often used for these events.

While many guests intentionally seek out BMSHP for their recreational opportunities, a large number discover or use the park unintentionally or incidentally. The park's urban setting and close proximity to downtown Chico and California State University, Chico make it a frequently used thoroughfare. Many students, for example, pass through the grounds on their way to class and stop to enjoy the trees or catch up on homework. A bike path running through the park brings many people on their way to a variety of locations. Some that stop had not planned on recreating at the park, but stumbled upon the opportunity.

Since its opening in 1993, the BMSHP Visitor Center has expanded the recreational opportunities available at the park. Inside, people can view historical exhibits and park-related videos, or shop in the Bidwell Mansion Association run General Store. The building can also host special events such as meetings, presentations, and special exhibits.

Bidwell Mansion is the fourth zone of recreation for the unit. Because of its historic nature, recreation inside the mansion is significantly controlled. Activities are primarily limited to guided tours through the home, but other activities are occasionally offered including photography, open-house style touring, and performances. The mansion is locked and only available under supervision of CSP staff.

Research Resources

For subject specific research suggestions, see Research Bibliography in Appendix.

The following CSP resources are available when planning interpretive programs and facilities. These entities have park plans, archives, museum collections, libraries, and specialists with extensive knowledge of BMSHP and its resources:

- Interpretation and Education Division
- CSP Archives
- Northern Service Center
- Photographic Archives

- Planning Division
- Archaeology, History, and Museum Division
- State Museum Resource Center
- Central Records

The following California State Parks have similar interpretive themes, interpretive periods, and museum collections to BMSHP. These units have archives, museum collections, park staff, and volunteers with extensive knowledge of their park's history and its resources. Interpretive planners are encouraged to contact these units and others to share resources and possibly create joint interpretive programs:

- Ide Adobe SHP
- Sutter's Fort SHP
- Sonoma SHP
- Fort Ross SHP
- Coloma SHP
- Monterey SHP
- Governor's Mansion SHP
- Stanford Mansion SHP
- Old Shasta SHP

The following organizations and facilities have extensive libraries and online resources for interpretive development. These organizations may have collections available for use in publications, programs, panels, and exhibits. They also have subject matter experts that can assist in research:

- California State University, Chico
- Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley
- California State Library
- California Archives
- Butte County Historical Society

- Butte County Clerk/Recorder's Office
- Butte County Library
- Society of California Pioneers
- California Historical Society
- Online Archives of California
- National Archives
- Library of Congress

3 Current Status of Interpretation

Interpretive Readiness

California State Parks employees and trained volunteers deliver a wide range of interpretive tours, school programs, and other services. Because of the integral role of interpretation to the operations of BMSHP, maintaining adequate levels of staffing is crucial to the continuance of high quality interpretive programs and events that contribute to the health, inspiration, and education of the people of California.

Eight CSP employees are currently involved in various aspects of interpretation at BMSHP. These include:

- One Valley Sector Superintendent (Permanent)
- One State Park Interpreter I (Permanent Intermittent)
- Four Park Interpretive Specialists (ATW)
- One Seasonal Park Aide (TAU)
- One Park Maintenance Worker (ATW)

Other employees that are available to assist or lead various interpretive activities include State Park Rangers, maintenance workers, and interpretive staff from nearby State Parks.

Experienced interpretive staff members lead interpretive training by creating and supplying training material, allowing those in training to shadow programs, and by providing feedback and evaluation. Interpretive training material makes use of formal training resources including the *Basic Interpretation Learning System* and *All Visitors Welcome*, as well as informal material such as a reading list and a park specific *Guide for Guides*. Evaluations are performed informally by lead staff and formally by the Sector Superintendent or assigned supervisor. Funding for interpretive programs and staff comes from BMSHP operations budget, money contributed by the Bidwell Mansion Association, grants, and community donations.

Volunteers form a vital cornerstone of operational support for interpretation at BMSHP. Short-term volunteers and VIPs assist with school trips, special events,

grounds upkeep, leading tours, and staffing the Visitor Center. A Park Interpretive Specialist, with assistance from other staff, oversees the paperwork, scheduling, training, and evaluation of active volunteers. The importance of a dedicated volunteer coordinator cannot be overstated, and the park's volunteer program has been significantly hindered when this position is not defined. Volunteers provide a wealth of expertise and help in reducing costs by assisting and supplementing CSP employees.

A variety of resources are available for assisting and planning park interpretation. Half of the Visitor Center is dedicated to office space. This space consists of six computers with internet and printer access, a multi-media theater, a research library, a collections storage room, a kitchen and meeting space, and four closets used for costumes, supplies, and storage. Several of these areas and objects could benefit from greater organization and updating.

Summary of Analysis

The park is well poised for interpretation. Quality staff is the most important aspect of this. Currently, the park maintains an adequate level of staffing and a good deal of personnel experience. In the past, park operations have suffered from lack of staff and high staff turnover. Administrative systems should be refined and improved in order to ensure consistency and continuity within the staff. Furthermore, better organization and new technology could significantly improve interpretive readiness.

Interpretive Services - Personal

BMSHP offers several kinds of personal interpretive services. Currently, these services primarily consist of guided tours through Bidwell Mansion and onsite school programs. In the future BMSHP could expand its personal interpretive opportunities to include a greater variety of services including roving interpretation, demonstration, living history, interpretive talks, junior rangers, and summer programs.

The following is a brief description and analysis of the current personal interpretive services conducted at BMSHP:

Guided Bidwell Mansion Tours

Regularly scheduled guided tours of Bidwell Mansion are the primary interpretive service conducted at BMSHP. Currently, staff and trained volunteers conduct tours on Saturdays, Sundays, and Mondays. In the past, tours ran seven days a week, then dropped to five days a week, and finally to the current operation of three days a week in October 2011. While the current three day schedule is designed to capture the majority of guests, many potential visitors miss out due to the limited availability.

These tours cost \$6 for adults and \$3 for youth ages 5-17. Payment can only be made by cash or check. While the price typically does not act as a barrier, some visitors find themselves unable to pay because they only have debit or credit cards that cannot be accepted by the park. Some guests visit nearby ATMs, while others do not return, resulting in lost revenue. Tours begin in the Visitor Center at the top of every hour and can accommodate up to twenty people at a time.

The guided tours last about one hour and cover all three stories of the mansion. Tour guides utilize a variety of resources and shadow experienced guides in order to develop their own personal theme and tour content. Guides design broad themes that tell the story of John and Annie Bidwell and their importance to California history. In the course of these tours, guides also touch upon subjects related to the park's primary and secondary interpretive themes, including general California history, the lives of local Mechoopda Maidu, architecture, the natural environment, and technology. The structure of the guided mansion tours allow the flexibility for the guide to adjust the tour theme or content depending on the particular makeup of each group. However, while tours can be adjusted for children, they are primarily oriented towards adults. The majority of guests respond extremely well to the guided tours. However, the structure and time restraints do not allow for the topical focus or expansion that many guests express an interest in.

Inside the mansion, the original staircases provide the only access to the second and third stories, creating a barrier for some visitors. Visitors can view a video tour of these floors in the Visitor Center. A discussion of this video can be found in **Interpretive Services - Non-Personal**. Currently, without prior accommodations, tours are only available in English, although BMSHP is working to expand onsite resources to include sign-language, Spanish, and other languages.

Guided tours are the most popular interpretive activity offered by BMSHP and are extremely successful at conveying park themes. Visitors to the park respond favorably to the tours and especially comment on the effectiveness and knowledge of the tour guides. These tours appeal to a wide variety of visitors and constitute a fundamental element of the interpretive mission and vision at BMSHP.

Other Mansion Tours

In addition to the regularly scheduled guided tours, staff or volunteers will periodically conduct special tours of Bidwell Mansion. These tours can be conducted at times outside of normal operating hours. They can be led for a particular group and with a particular thematic focus, such as artwork or agriculture, for example. These tours are not advertised and are held relatively infrequently.

This category also includes several annual events held at the park including the Farm City Harvest Festival, the Chico Women's Club Open House, and the BMSHP Holiday Evening Open House. These events typically make use of an open house format. Guides station themselves around the home and interact with visitors as they move around the mansion at their own pace. This format provides a very different environment than the guided tours and allows for more in-depth discussion and expansion on themes than is possible during a guided tour. Adding to the scene, guides typically dress in period-appropriate attire, which visitors enjoy very much. The park has a good selection of women's costumes that fit the 1868-1900 interpretive period for the park. However, with limited selections and a narrow range of sizes, it has a much smaller selection of men's clothing. It is important to note that these tours should not be considered living history programs. While they wear historic clothing, guides do not assume a character and interact with guests as modern people. Currently, no living history programs are conducted at the park.

School Tours

Another staple of interpretation at BMSHP are the educational tours and programs offered to elementary school classes. A dedicated school coordinator is a vital piece for ensuring successful educational experiences for school groups visiting the park. This position should ensure staff readiness and act as a point of contact for educators. Approximately thirty school groups visit the park each school year, exposing over 1,000 students to the story of John and Annie Bidwell. The current school year, 2013/14, will host over fifty groups totaling over 1,800 students. While classes visit the mansion from all over northern California, the majority come from surrounding Butte County school districts. These include the Chico Unified and Paradise Unified school districts, as well as local home and charter schools. BMSHP offers school trips year round, but teachers will typically schedule trips in order to coincide with their third or fourth grade social science content.

The fundamental part of a school trip consists of a forty-five minute guided tour through Bidwell Mansion. These school tours are distinct from the regular guided tours offered to the general public and guides design them according to California History and Social Science Content Standards for third and fourth grade.⁴⁸ Students hear the story of John and Annie Bidwell, their mansion, and what life would have been like in late 1800s California. As per department policy, BMSHP provides the basic school tour of Bidwell Mansion free of charge.

⁴⁸ See "Educational Framework and Standards" section and Appendix for more information on specific content standards.

In addition to the mansion tour, classes also have the opportunity to add an interactive program. The “Gold Rush” program covers the basics of the California Gold Rush and the lives of the people involved. It concludes by teaching students how to pan for gold and allowing them to find and keep real gold flakes. The “1800s Gadgets” program discusses technology and inventions of the late 19th Century and allows students to observe and interact with gadgets used during that time. In the past, groups had the option of another program that detailed the lives of the local Maidu Indians, but due to lack of staff training this program has not been offered for several years. BMSHP staff are currently working to revamp this program. Both the “Gold Rush” and the “1800s Gadgets” programs have existed for many years and have undergone several iterations. They require updating in order to better conform to current content standards. Furthermore, guides have been working to revamp a popular, but outdated Maidu program. This program will reflect current educational standards and will make use of an updated consultation with the Mechoopda Tribe. Programs run in conjunction with mansion tours and also take forty-five minutes. In order to cover staff costs, BMSHP charges a fee for scheduling a program. In 2013/14 groups paid a fee of \$50 per class.

BMSHP school tours and programs consistently receive positive feedback from teachers, parents, and students. However, several issues do arise. Classes come to the mansion with various degrees of prior knowledge about the Bidwells and other subjects, some with very little familiarity and others with a great deal. This variation makes it difficult for guides to recognize and adjust their tours to the relative level of experience. Furthermore, no formal system exists to gauge the effectiveness of the tours and programs. A pre- and post-trip packet as well as a standard teacher feedback form may help in addressing these issues. Tours and programs work best with a smaller number of students, but increasing class sizes and higher transportation costs have led to an increase in the average group size. This increase, coupled with the availability of staff members, leads to difficulties in managing large numbers of students, which impacts the effectiveness of the tours and programs.

In the past, with the help of CSUC students, BMSHP offered off-site, in-classroom, interpretive presentations. Due to budget restraints as well as staff and volunteer shortages, these presentations have not been available since 2007. There are no plans of restarting them at this time.

Talks

BMSHP staff and volunteers will infrequently give interpretive talks. These talks can include a variety of subjects and can be conducted on site or off site. Only a few talks have been given over the previous several years.

BMSHP has also played host to talks presented by individuals and entities not associated with CSP. While these talks undergo a special event review process, the content and focus may not be related to BMSHP or its interpretive themes because they are not conducted by park staff.

Informal Interpretation

In addition to organized interpretive services, BMSHP staff frequently engage in informal interpretive discussions with visitors while in the course of other duties in the Visitor Center and on the grounds. Due to the park's current operation schedule, location, and use as a thoroughfare to CSUC and downtown Chico, these informal interpretive contacts constitute an important part of the visitor experience at BMSHP.

Summary of Analysis

Personal interpretation forms the backbone of operations at BMSHP. Guided tours are extremely effective but there is a need for more diversity. A greater variety of programs utilizing a variety of interpretive platforms could significantly increase and expand the park's audience. School programs are successful, but need to be better organized, refined, and expanded in order to ensure their continued success.

Interpretive Services - Non-Personal

Interpretive Facilities

Bidwell Mansion: Bidwell Mansion stands as the centerpiece and primary interpretive feature of BMSHP, and has been restored both interiorly and externally to the 1868-1900 historic period. The inside of the mansion is typically only available to the public via regularly scheduled guided tours or special events. Since the park has no perimeter fencing, the grounds and outside of the house remain open to the public outside of typical operating hours. Periodically, the inside of the home is made available in an "open-house" format, allowing visitors to self-tour the house. These tours mainly occur as part of the December holiday season. The home is often decorated and interpretive signs are placed throughout, describing different items on display. Mansion staff are posted inside the home, interacting with guests and preventing damage to artifacts. During these events, staff usually move several higher profile or delicate artifacts to prevent damage.

As part of the restoration process, CSP has furnished the home with period appropriate artifacts. A minority of the artifacts are original Bidwell pieces that have been gathered from various sources, while the remainder are period pieces or reproductions. Several enlarged historic photographs showing various locations inside

the home are also on display and allow guests to see what the home looked like during the Bidwells' time.

The first floor of the mansion is wheelchair accessible, and, in compliance with ADA standards, BMSHP offers a video tour of the second and third stories (see **Interpretive Media**).

Grounds: The BMSHP grounds consist of approximately 2.5 acres of land surrounding the mansion and Visitor Center. Uses for this space occur both formally and informally, including both interpretive and non-interpretive activities. The primary interpretive features of the BMSHP grounds include:

- **Lawn:** A non-historic grass lawn stretches from the Esplanade to the paved circular driveway in front of the mansion. It is available for many interpretive uses as well as non-interpretive uses including weddings, quinceañeras, and photographs.
- **Interpretive Panels:** Two interpretive panels located outside the Visitor Center provide general information regarding the park and display a timeline of significant events in the history of the Bidwell's and of the home. When the park is not open, these panels act as the primary interpretive material available to guests.
- **Trees:** The trees of BMSHP stand as one of the most recognizable features of the park and are notable for their historical significance and as examples of the historic local biome. The trees provide excellent opportunities for non-personal interpretation. Throughout the years, the trees have been labeled and interpreted in a variety of manners. The history of these various labeling systems is not entirely clear, involving at various times the individual or combined input of CSP, the Chico Horticultural Society, and CSUC. Currently, the labels can be grouped into two different categories, those placed by CSP and those placed by CSUC. This outdated and confusing system renders the tree labels almost completely ineffective as interpretive pieces.

The labels placed by CSP appear to have been part of a self-guided tour of the grounds that included an accompanying interpretive pamphlet entitled "A Gift from the Past: A Guide to Bidwell Mansion's Grounds". The brown labels include a number that corresponds to stops and information designated in the pamphlet. They also list the common and scientific names for the tree as well as its country of origin. Between 1991 and 1993, a collaboration of BMSHP, the Bidwell Mansion Association, and individuals from the CSUC Art Department

worked to create this self-guided tour as an update to an earlier system.⁴⁹ Further complicating the issue, the labels appear to be updated versions of labels placed on the grounds by the Chico Horticultural Society possibly as far back as the 1950s.⁵⁰ Several trees listed in the pamphlet no longer exist and several other trees no longer bear their accompanying labels. With the pamphlets no longer in print and not available to the public, the labels remain a mystery to guests.

Other labels appear on various trees throughout the grounds as part of the CSUC Arboretum system and correspond to a pamphlet entitled "Campus Tree Map & Guide". The CSUC Biology Department produces the pamphlet and provides copies for the BMSHP Visitor Center to make available to guests upon request. The Arboretum includes trees and plants located on CSP property and the neighboring CSUC campus. The black Arboretum placards bear the tree's common name, scientific name, country of origin, an identification number, and the words "California State University, Chico Arboretum". Several known errors occur in the pamphlet and some of the trees listed no longer stand. It is not known what role, if any, CSP played in the labeling of trees located on its property or what agreements it had in place with the university. According to discussions with CSUC personnel involved with the Arboretum, the university will likely be updating this system in the near future.

- Carriage Shed: A rebuilt carriage shed stands to the immediate northwest of the mansion. Constructed in the 1980s, this structure stands near the location of the historic carriage shed that existed during the Bidwells' time. A plaque by the shed informs visitors that this building is a modern construction. Park staff keep the carriage shed open and available for viewing during normal park operating hours and when school tours are taking place on the grounds. The inside of the structure houses six historic carriages, several of which are believed to have been owned by the Bidwells. No interpretive media currently exists for the carriages or carriage shed and nothing distinguishes between the original and non-original pieces. Visitors must ask park staff if they desire to learn anything about the carriages or carriage shed.
- Architect's Cottage: Attached to the south side of the carriage shed is a small brick building known as the Architect's Cottage. The Bidwells used this structure for a variety of uses during their time, including purportedly housing

⁴⁹ *BMSHP Unit History*.

⁵⁰ Oral history from local tree expert Wes Dempsey. Chico Horticultural Society records are unavailable from that period.

the mansion's architect, Henry Cleaveland, during construction. Currently used as CSP office space, the Architect's Cottage has not been restored, is not open to the public, and is not used for interpretation. No signage identifies the building in any way.

- **Annie's Garden:** Located on the south side of the home, Annie's Garden consists of a small reproduction garden area with a variety of plantings, a small path, a bench, and a wisteria arbor. Volunteers maintain this area, which demonstrates what the Bidwells' landscaping would have been like. Besides a small plaque dedicating the garden to the memory of Annie's great-grandniece, no other interpretive material exists for this area.
- **Rose Garden:** Adjacent to Annie's Garden, volunteers have planted and maintain a rose garden. The Bidwells did grow roses, but did not maintain a dedicated rose garden on the property. The current garden contains several varieties of roses grown by the Bidwells as well as several other prominent varieties from their time. Several plantings are genetic descendants of actual Bidwell roses. A volunteer has recently added small signs that designate the name, variety, and year of development for each type of rose in the garden. No other interpretive media exists for this area.
- **Historic Footbridge:** To the south of the mansion, an iron footbridge spans Big Chico Creek. This bridge is a reconstruction of an historic bridge that crossed the creek during the Bidwells' time. A small sign tells that the bridge originally existed around 1900 and that the Rotary Club, with help from CSP and others, rebuilt the bridge in 1983.
- **State Historical Marker:** Originally placed on the grounds in 1966 by the California State Parks Commission, a large State Historical Marker now stands adjacent to the Carriage Shed. The marker gives a brief description of John Bidwell's contributions to California Agriculture and designates "Rancho del Arroyo Chico" as State Historical Landmark No. 329.
- **Stone Monument:** At the extreme southeast corner of the park, at the intersection of Sol-Wil-Le-No Avenue and the Esplanade, stands a large stone historical marker commemorating "the Oregon Trail and the site of the old Adobe built for General Bidwell by the Mechoopda Indians in 1852". Research of historic newspapers indicates that the monument dates from 1925 when the Pioneer Historic Association of California placed it on the grounds.
- **Gazebo:** A gazebo stands on the lawn to the front of the mansion where an historic gazebo stood during the Bidwells' time. A plaque tells of its

construction between 1979 and 1981. No current interpretation utilizes the gazebo, but visitors to the park often use it for recreational purposes such as picnics or photography.

- **Millstone:** Under the Ginkgo tree next to the Visitor Center lays an unassuming millstone. This millstone supposedly originated from John Bidwell's flour mill, historically located across the Esplanade from the park. No labels or markings identify the millstone in any way. However, this may be a good thing as its location makes it susceptible to vandalism, damage, or theft.
- **Annie's Hitching Post:** To the rear of the Carriage Shed stand a set of concrete steps and a post identified in the BMSHP brochure and "A Gift from the Past: A Guide to Bidwell Mansion's Grounds" as "Annie's Hitching Post." It is believed that Annie would have used the steps to mount and dismount carriages and horses. No other interpretation exists for this site.

Visitor Center: Opened to the public in 1993, the current BMSHP Visitor Center sits directly north of Bidwell Mansion and houses bathrooms, a lobby and gift store, an exhibit hall, a theater, staff offices and kitchen, and an artifact storage room.

Non-personal interpretive features include:

- **Exhibit Hall:** The Visitor Center includes a small exhibit hall consisting of panels and displayed artifacts that interpret the lives of John and Annie Bidwell and their impact on California history. A copy of the book *Dear General*, a collection of letters exchanged by the Bidwells, is available for guests to read and is the only interactive part of the exhibit area. The 1990 Interpretive Plan and 1992 Exhibit Text documents outline the design and content of the Exhibit Hall. There have been no significant changes to the content or design of this area since its opening in 1993. While the Exhibit Hall, overall, does an effective job of interpretation, it is in need of updating. The look and layout of the hall feel dated and the lack of interactive displays limit its effectiveness for certain groups, especially children.
- **Theater Photographs:** A selection of photographs is displayed in the theater that adjoins the Exhibit Hall. These historic images depict a variety of scenes related to the Bidwells. Many visitors show interest in the photographs, but no labels exist to inform guests of what they are seeing.
- **Victorian Secrets Display:** Also located in the theater, an exhibit titled "Victorian Secrets" displays and discusses historic undergarments. A glass display case contains the exhibit, but, unlike the Exhibit Hall cases, it has

no cove lighting. It is not known when this display began or who designed it, but the contents of the case have not changed for several years. Due to its location and lack of lighting, it is frequently overlooked and missed by visitors.

Interpretive Media

Non-personal interpretive media currently in use at BMSHP include:

BMSHP Free Brochure: This standard brochure produced by CSP provides basic information about the Bidwells and orients guests to the park. It is available inside the Visitor Center as well as outside, making it available to the public outside of normal operating hours. In a given week, about sixty brochures are taken by members of the public.

Other Brochures: Several other brochures are available for free in the Visitor Center. Published by both CSP as well as other entities, they cover topics including California State Park opportunities, local history, and other attractions. Some are interpretive in nature while others are not.

Websites: CSP maintains an official page for BMSHP through its www.parks.ca.gov website. This page provides basic interpretation and orientation information. In addition, BMSHP staff update a Facebook page at www.facebook.com/bidwellmansionshp. This page allows for more up to date information and interaction with interested members of the public. This page has been increasingly utilized for interpretation through daily posts of historical information. A website is also run by the Bidwell Mansion Association, the park's cooperating association, at www.bidwellmansionassociation.com. This site and its content are not produced by CSP, but done so under the auspices of the association's contract.

"The Map of History": Upon request visitors can view a twenty-five minute interpretive video entitled "The Map of History", which is shown in the theater. Produced by CSP in 1993, the video provides a brief overview of John Bidwell's life and his role in the history of California. Despite being over twenty years old, "The Map of History" does an extremely effective job at discussing the Bidwells and their legacy and helps introduce major park themes. Closed captioning provides accessibility for the hearing impaired. The video is available for purchase through State Parks' online store and in the BMSHP gift store.

Second and Third Floor Accessibility Video: Visitors who are unable to access the upper stories of Bidwell Mansion have the option of returning to the Visitor Center and viewing a video tour of the second and third floors. Crown Broadcasting and

Communications produced the video in 2003 for CSP in order to meet accessibility needs. The video shown today is only a segment of a longer video tour that covered the entire house. While the video is captioned, the poor quality does not make it appropriate for vision impaired guests. The video comes off as poorly produced and out of date, and should be replaced.

Gaps in Existing Interpretation

Currently non-personal interpretive services are only available in English.

Summary of Analysis

The park's non-personal interpretation is in need of major improvement. For that which does exist, most of it is outdated, poorly designed, and overall ineffective. Interpretive materials on the grounds are especially lacking. With the park open less for guided personal tours and with the cost of staff becoming a greater issue, the importance of non-personal interpretation is only increasing. Current non-personal interpretation is not adequate for meeting this increasing need.

Collections

History of the Collection

Upon Annie Bidwell's death in 1918, personal items and documents were dispersed to her heirs and the mansion became the property of the Presbyterian Church. Following its establishment as a State Parks unit in 1964, BMSHP made an appeal for original and period artifacts in order to furnish the mansion and to be used for interpretation. Bidwell family members, historic associations, local citizens, and CSP museum resource centers contributed both original and period artifacts to the collection. In addition, some objects remained in the mansion upon its transfer from the university.

In 2013 BMSHP staff updated its Scope of Collections document.⁵¹ This document explains the history, purpose, and general location of the collection and establishes parameters for the accumulation and use of objects. The primary collection consists of approximately 7,000 artifacts including archival material, books, letters, maps, photographs, documents related to the Bidwells, textiles, art, personal objects, decorative items, and furnishings. Approximately 25% of the collection originated with the Bidwells, the remainder being period pieces or reproductions. Records and information regarding these objects are cataloged in the CSP museum database, "The Museum System" (TMS).

⁵¹ See Appendix.

Collection Objects Currently Used for Interpretation

The majority of the collection currently resides inside Bidwell Mansion and provides the foundation for interpretive tours at BMSHP. The home includes 19th-century furnishings, original fireplaces, period lighting fixtures, and works of art. An ethnographic collection includes Asian and Native American objects including vases and baskets. Other objects on display, both original and period, include books, textiles, natural history specimens, farm implements, a carbide-gas generator, and many other objects. A large collection of textiles remain stored away from the public on the third story. The mansion itself survives in relatively good condition.

The Exhibit Hall displays contain original and period pieces as part of its interpretive exhibits. An environmentally controlled artifact storage room contains photo archives, maps, letters, other documents, Native American basketry and grinding stones, additional household goods, textiles, and items in need of repair.

Six historic carriages, along with associated objects, are also stored and displayed in the rebuilt carriage shed.

In addition to tours and exhibits, school programs also make use of collection objects. Objects can also be used for the research and design of interpretive programs.

Object/Environment Evaluations

Several recent inventories have been conducted, including the cataloging of the mansion in preparation of possible closure at the end of the 2012 fiscal year and an inventory of the Artifact Storage Room following flooding in April 2012.

In 2012, Proposition 84 funds became available to the park in order to perform a Collections Facility Improvement and Conservations Project. The intent of this Assessment Project is to undertake a comprehensive artifact assessment and implement appropriate recommendations. During the pre-assessment stage of this project, BMSHP staff reviewed accession documentation, TMS entries, Annie Bidwell's will, and previous inventories in order to confirm which objects belonged to the Bidwells. This process revealed many discrepancies regarding the provenance of various objects. Staff have worked to research, clarify, and document information about these artifacts, but the process is on-going and further work is needed.

The environmental condition inside Bidwell Mansion and its effect on artifacts is of special concern, and BMSHP monitors this by utilizing data loggers. Monthly recording of temperature and humidity fluctuations, alongside personal observations revealed issues involving artifact deterioration and precautions were taken to reduce direct sunlight to certain pieces. Storage also creates a problem with textiles, paintings,

books, and other objects stored in cupboards and other areas not suitable for proper storage of artifacts.

Additional Collections Not Housed at Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park

Incidental to the collections currently housed at BMSHP, objects found in the course of two excavations on the property remain housed off site.

A 1987 excavation to identify the location of the Bidwell's carriage shed uncovered over 2,000 objects, including Native American artifacts dating to between 700 and 1,000 CE. These objects have been cataloged and currently reside in the State Archaeological Collections Research Facility.⁵²

Another excavation, conducted in 1990 in anticipation of the construction of the Visitor Center, also uncovered Native American artifacts. In 2013 these pieces passed to Dr. Craig White of Sonoma State University for cataloging, analysis, and documentation.

Special Concerns

As with so many other State Parks collections, BMSHP retains too many of certain types of objects. The textile room, for example, contains many more objects than can ever be used for interpretation at the park. Meanwhile, other objects that could be used for interpretive programs do not exist in the collection.

During the pre-assessment phase of the Assessment Project, a large collection of objects that fall outside of the parameters of the current Scope of Collections document were deaccessioned and transferred to other CSP units and a local non-profit museum. Through the drafting of this IMP, interpretive possibilities and uses will be better identified. Rather than collecting objects and keeping them in storage, objects will be assessed from the view point of their potential utilization in interpretive programs. This process coupled with the Assessment Project will allow BMSHP to trim down unused or irrelevant objects and to add relevant collections that will aid and expand the interpretive programming at the park.

Summary of Analysis

BMSHP collections are overcoming forty-plus years of varying and inconsistent management. The record keeping is poor and needs to be improved. Systems need to be put in place to create a solution to this issue and ensure the effectiveness of

⁵² Keith L. Johnson, *In Search of John Bidwell's Carriage House: Archaeological Investigations at Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park, Chico, CA* (December, 1987).

future record keeping. Park staff need a better understanding of and access to collections and collections information. There should be an effort to research and document information regarding specific objects. Finally, better storage and protection of objects is needed. A dedicated staff member could help solve all of these issues.

Marketing

BMSHP uses a variety of methods to inform the public about interpretive and educational opportunities. These methods include public service announcements sent to local news organizations, posters placed on the grounds and around the Chico area, and websites, including the official page on the State Parks website, a Facebook page maintained by park staff, and the website of the Bidwell Mansion Association. The park currently does minimal promotion for its day-to-day operations and most visitors become aware of the park through word of mouth or from sources outside of CSP control. The methods mentioned above are primarily used in advertising special events and typically result in an increase of inquiries via telephone calls and other means. They vary in success depending on several factors, including timing, level and tone of coverage in local media outlets, and organization of marketing efforts.

The potential closure of the park at the end of the 2012 fiscal year created an important issue for the park. Intense media coverage and local campaigns highlighted the planned closure of the park, but when the park remained open it went relatively unreported. Therefore, many in the public do not realize that the park has remained open and that programs continue to be held at the park.

For the advertisement of school tours and programs, BMSHP maintains a database of local school partners who have previously visited the park. In the fall, teachers receive a letter informing them of the educational opportunities for the coming school year and how to schedule a trip. This information is also posted on the park's official State Parks webpage.

Summary of Analysis

BMSHP's marketing has traditionally relied on the positive response of tour attendees and the park's status as a local landmark. More formal and intentional marketing methods have been utilized inconsistently and inadequately. The park could benefit from a more intentional, focused approach and a better working relationship with media sources. More efforts can also be put into reaching people outside of the surrounding Chico area.

4 Park Support

Community Involvement

The Bidwell Mansion stands as one of Chico's most prominent and recognizable local landmarks. The park's location is a major asset. The California State University, Chico campus and downtown Chico border the park and are within easy walking distance, while the Esplanade, one of the busiest thoroughfares in the city, runs in front and within view of the mansion. Directional signage on Highway 99 orients travelers to the park. Local businesses and publications use the names "Bidwell" or "Rancho Chico" as well as images of Bidwell Mansion. In fact, the most recent version of Chico Police Department vehicles features an image of the mansion. The legacy of the Bidwells in the city as well as the mansion's high visibility and recognition make it one of the most enduring and prominent landmarks of the community.

As such, the community is highly supportive of Bidwell Mansion. In the 1950s and 1960s, it was the vast support and activism from local citizens that brought about the preservation and protection of the home and the eventual establishment of BMSHP in 1964. Today, that same loyalty and devotion continues within the local community. Chico citizens enjoy the park on a daily basis through both formal and informal visitation.

However, this loyalty to the mansion as a landmark does not always extend to the park unit as a whole. The popular use of the name "Bidwell" as well as the park's proximity to downtown Chico and CSUC leads many to believe the park is owned and operated by either the city or the university. And among those who understand the role of CSP, some question the role of State government in operating the park. This sentiment is limited and in large part BMSHP enjoys high rapport with local individuals and organizations.

Several local organizations hold events at the park. The annual Harvest Festival, presented by the Farm City Celebration and co-sponsored by BMSHP, takes place at the park in early November. In December, the Chico Women's Club/Beulah Rebekah Lodge #60 hold a free annual open house featuring several choirs. The park is also used for weddings, events for local businesses and organizations, and community meetings.

Interpretive and educational programming is influenced by the community and general public through community meetings, through the park's cooperating

association, individually expressed opinions, and various forms of communication including a Facebook page.

Partnership and Support

Bidwell Mansion Association

The Bidwell Mansion Association (BMA) acts as the park's cooperating association. The BMA began in January of 1980 through the joining of two previous groups, the Bidwell Mansion Restoration Association and the Bidwell Mansion Cooperative Association. These previous organizations played a crucial role in the park's early years, and the BMA continues that support through fund raising, publicity, restoration efforts, providing volunteers, and day-to-day operational support.

As stated in the BMA by-laws, Article 1:

The purpose of the Bidwell Mansion Association is as set forth in the Articles of Incorporation, as amended, which includes the following:

- a. To foster public interest in support of the Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park.
- b. To work toward completion of the restoration of the Bidwell Mansion.
- c. Acquisition of authentic furnishings, belongings and mementos of the Bidwells, or suitable and appropriate items of their period.
- d. To operate financially productive enterprises for the benefit of the Bidwell Mansion.

The operations, use of property and assets of the Bidwell Mansion Association shall be limited to interpretive and other educational purposes, as related to General John Bidwell and Annie E.K. Bidwell, in the Northern Buttes District of the State Park System, and for the restoration and improvements in the Bidwell Mansion.

Bidwell Mansion Community Project

In response to the potential closing of BMSHP at the end of the 2012 fiscal year, a group of concerned citizens and representatives from several local organizations formed an ad hoc organization they named the Bidwell Mansion Community Project (BMCP), for the purposes of funding park operations and keeping the mansion open to the public. Via various fund raising efforts, the BMCP raised over \$140,000 through a

designated fund set up and managed by the North Valley Community Foundation (NVCF). The Fundraising Policy Statement of the BMCP states that any funds “will be held by NVCF on behalf of BMCP and expended on projects to support the continued operations of Bidwell Mansion based on community input and consensus of the BMCP Steering Committee”. The NVCF continues to maintain the designated account and contributes funds to CSP as directed by the BMCP under the terms of a negotiated donor agreement.

Other Current Partners

Farm City: Farm City Celebration primarily coordinates with BMSHP during the annual harvest festival. The group is dedicated to increasing understanding, appreciation, and interaction with agriculture among the urban community.

Other Local Historical Attractions: BMSHP networks with other local historical attractions including the Stansbury Home and the Far West Heritage Association, which manages the Patrick Ranch Museum and the Chico Museum. The park has coordinated with these groups in organizing special interpretive events and deaccessioned collection objects have been given to them in order to preserve the items’ interpretive context.

Outdoor Education for ALL!: BMSHP connects with other educational providers through the group Outdoor Education for ALL! (OEFA). OEFA consists of a group of educators, naturalists, professionals, and volunteers that share a common interest in creating greater opportunity for natural science and outdoor education in northern California.

CREEC: The California Department of Education introduced an improved way for teachers to connect to exploratory, place-based, and environmental education instruction for pre-kindergarten through high school. The CREEC website provides a communication network for environmental education providers, businesses, government agencies, and community organizations through which educators can access high quality resources to enhance the environmental literacy of California’s students. BMSHP is connected through this website.

Chico Area Museum Alliance: BMSHP is also a member of the Museum Alliance, a group of agencies, museums, and community organizations that meet quarterly to communicate about upcoming events. This group networks with the Museum of Northern California Art (MONCA), a newly formed non-profit which has recently leased 4,000 sq. feet of the county owned Veteran’s Hall in order for the exhibition of Northern California art.

Las Senoras: The Las Senoras of Chico is a non-profit organization that secured donations of objects for the mansion and has held special fundraising events. Although

the organization no longer contributes much interpretation or fundraising, they attend public meetings and continue to provide input regarding the direction of the park.

Campus Tree Tours: Tree tours of the CSUC campus begin on the park grounds. These tours are scheduled primarily through the CSU Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) and are typically led by a retired CSUC biology professor. Other tours are advertised for general public participation.

Other Potential Interpretive Partners

- California State University, Chico - Including Special Collections, History, Education, and Recreation departments, etc.
- Butte College
- City of Chico - Including the Chamber of Commerce and the Chico Area Recreation District (CARD)
- Mechoopda Indian Tribe of Chico Rancheria
- Butte County Historical Society
- Butte County Library
- Other California State Parks

Other Interpretive Providers

Interpretive Provider

Location

Connection to BMSHP

Cultural Programs

Science Ed.

Environmental Ed

Service Learning

Outdoor Recreation

Possible Collaboration

California State Parks and National Parks

Interpretive Provider	Location	Connection to BMSHP	Cultural Programs	Science Ed.	Environmental Ed	Service Learning	Outdoor Recreation	Possible Collaboration
Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park	Nevada City	John Bidwell testified as an expert witness in the case against a hydraulic mining company which effectively ended hydraulic mining in California. Comparison of his experience to the Malakoff Diggins may be made.	x		x		x	Shared exhibits, living history
Empire State Mine SHP	Grass Valley	Former gold rush era mine. John Bidwell made his first fortune in gold, so Empire State Mine would give visitors a good idea of gold rush history.	x				x	speaker series, shared exhibits, school programs, living history
William B. Ide Adobe State Historic Park	Red Bluff	Both John Bidwell and William Ide were involved in the Bear Flag Revolt	x			x	x	shared exhibits, gold school program

Other Interpretive Providers

<i>Interpretive Provider</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Connection to BMSHP</i>	<i>Cultural Programs</i>	<i>Science Ed.</i>	<i>Environmental Ed</i>	<i>Service Learning</i>	<i>Outdoor Recreation</i>	<i>Possible Collaboration</i>
Bidwell-Sacramento River State Park	Chico	The Bidwell Landing was part of John Bidwell's Rancho. Original park land was given by Annie Bidwell.	x		x	x	x	outdoor programs, nature walks
Lake Oroville Visitor Center and Bidwell Bar Boat Launch Area	Oroville	John Bidwell started his gold mining operation at a place later named Bidwell Bar. The thriving mining camp provided the income Bidwell needed to purchase Rancho del Arroyo Chico. The once flourishing town, now rests at the bottom of Lake Oroville. The historic Bidwell Bar suspension bridge was relocated to the Bidwell Bar Boat Launch area.	x	x	x	x	x	shared exhibits, Maidu school program
Shasta State Historic Park	Shasta	The Town of Shasta, known as California's northern mining district, once stood on the site of this park. John Bidwell's friend Pierson B. Reading was a pioneer and the first person to discover gold in the Shasta area. Reading's daughter, Alice Reading painted the portraits of John and Annie that hang in the Bidwell Mansion.	x					shared exhibits, speaker series, gold rush school program, outdoor nature programs
Weaverville Joss House State Historic Park	Weaverville	Weaverville Joss House reflects the strong presence of the Chinese in many early northern California communities. The area's Chinese community, and the frequent disruptions of anti-Chinese agitation, played a significant role in the history of the Bidwells. John Bidwell was a major employer of Chinese workers and an opponent of anti-Chinese sentiments.	x					shared exhibits, speaker series

Other Interpretive Providers

<i>Interpretive Provider</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Connection to BMSHP</i>	<i>Cultural Programs</i>	<i>Science Ed.</i>	<i>Environmental Ed</i>	<i>Service Learning</i>	<i>Outdoor Recreation</i>	<i>Possible Collaboration</i>
Lassen Volcanic National Park	Mineral	John and Annie Bidwell went on a camping trip to Lassen Park with John Muir. Annie was alive to witness the 1915 eruption. John summits Lassen Peak in his 70s. John also knew, Peter Lassen, the namesake of the peak.		x	x	x	x	speaker series

Other Local Attractions

Gateway Science Museum	Chico	Owned and operated by CSUC, the Gateway's permanent collection includes several items with some connection to the Bidwells. The Gateway occasionally also hosts temporary exhibits that touch on themes similar to those at BMSHP.		x	x			school programs
Kids and Creeks	Chico	Kids and Creeks is geared toward scientific education regarding watersheds and watershed habitats; the Bidwell Mansion's location along Big Chico Creek would be a natural extension of that education.		x	x		x	nature programs and school programs

Other Interpretive Providers

<i>Interpretive Provider</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Connection to BMSHP</i>	<i>Cultural Programs</i>	<i>Science Ed.</i>	<i>Environmental Ed</i>	<i>Service Learning</i>	<i>Outdoor Recreation</i>	<i>Possible Collaboration</i>
Big Chico Creek Ecological Reserve	Chico	The reserve is located on 3,950 acres of diverse canyon and ridge habitats, including 4.5 miles of Big Chico Creek. This natural environment is similar to what existed when John Bidwell first arrived in Chico. Both reserve and Mansion are located along Big Chico Creek and are within Maidu territory.	x	x	x	x	x	nature programs, outdoor walks, and school programs
Chico Creek Nature Center	Chico	The Chico Creek Nature Center is the the gateway and official information center for Bidwell Park. The original land for the park was donated by Annie Bidwell. The Center includes the Forestry Station, which John Bidwell donated land for in 1888 with experimental trees, and Cedar grove historical landmark. CCNC also conducts school programs.	x	x	x	x	x	school programs, shared exhibits, speaker series
Chico Museum	Chico	The Chico Museum has exhibits related to John Bidwell, considering his central role in founding the town. Many of their rotating exhibits also relate to the Bidwell's and other park themes.	x					shared exhibits
Stansbury House	Chico	The home's original owner, Dr. Stansbury, was a contemporary of John Bidwell. John's diaries indicate that Stansbury was one of several doctors that John visited. The home is a similar, but very distinctm example of local victorian architecture.	x					shared exhibits, speaker series, living history

Other Interpretive Providers

<i>Interpretive Provider</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Connection to BMSHP</i>	<i>Cultural Programs</i>	<i>Science Ed.</i>	<i>Environmental Ed</i>	<i>Service Learning</i>	<i>Outdoor Recreation</i>	<i>Possible Collaboration</i>
Valene L. Smith Anthropology Museum	Chico	Part of CSUC, this is a museum showcasing historical and anthropological artifacts. Past exhibitions have included displays on Ishi and local Indian artifacts.	x	x				School programs, shared exhibits, speaker series
Patrick Ranch	Durham	A preserved and operated historic local ranch, originally owned by contemporaries of the Bidwells. Patrick Ranch includes exhibits about local agriculture.	x		x			school programs, speaker series, shared exhibits, living history
Depot Museum	Paradise	Railroad and Logging history, John Bidwell frequently clashed with the railroad magnates. Associated with the Gold Nugget Museum.	x					Speaker series, shared exhibits
Gold Nugget Museum	Paradise	The Gold Nugget Museum concentrates on life during the 1850s, the gold rush, and the Maidu, all of which overlap with major themes of the Bidwell Mansion.	x		x			Maidu school program

Other Interpretive Providers

<i>Interpretive Provider</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Connection to BMSHP</i>	<i>Cultural Programs</i>	<i>Science Ed.</i>	<i>Environmental Ed</i>	<i>Service Learning</i>	<i>Outdoor Recreation</i>	<i>Possible Collaboration</i>
Pioneer Memorial Museum	Oroville	Large collection of 1800s gold rush and Indian artifacts, including a clock from Bidwell's Bar. Similar themes, could share exhibits with Bidwell Mansion.	x					shared exhibits, gold rush tour,
Chinese Museum	Oroville	Still operating, historic Chinese temple. The area's Chinese community, and the frequent disruptions of anti-Chinese agitation, played a significant role in the history of the Bidwells. John Bidwell was a major employer of Chinese workers and an opponent of anti-Chinese sentiments.	x					shared exhibits, speaker series
Feather River Nature Center & Native Plant Park	Oroville	The Bath House Museum provides nature education programming, Taxidermy dioramas about local wildlife, basaltic boulders as well as paintings. The Nature Center grounds are home to various native plants, trees and animals.		x	x		x	Nature walks, school program,
C.F. Lott Home in Sank Park	Oroville	C.F. Lott was a contemporary and acquaintance of John Bidwell, who practiced as a lawyer at Bidwell's Bar. This museum covers similar local themes to BMSHP.	x					speaker series, architectural tour

Other Interpretive Providers

<i>Interpretive Provider</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Connection to BMSHP</i>	<i>Cultural Programs</i>	<i>Science Ed.</i>	<i>Environmental Ed</i>	<i>Service Learning</i>	<i>Outdoor Recreation</i>	<i>Possible Collaboration</i>
Ehmann Home	Oroville	House museum about Freda Ehmann and the Ehmann Olive Company. Themes regarding local agriculture similar to BMSHP. Specific olive connection: John Bidwell cultivated olives and was the first person to press olives for olive oil in northern California.	x					agricultural tour, shared exhibits, speaker series
Bolt's Antique Tool Museum	Oroville	A large collection of historic tools and gadgets.	x	x				gadget school program, speaker series, shared exhibits
Butte County Historical Society Museum	Oroville	Exhibits about Butte County history and life in the 1800s.	x					shared exhibits, speaker series

Other Interpretive Providers

Interpretive Provider

Location

Connection to BMSHP

Cultural Programs

Science Ed.

Environmental Ed

Service Learning

Outdoor Recreation

Possible Collaboration

Nearby Locations

<i>Interpretive Provider</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Connection to BMSHP</i>	<i>Cultural Programs</i>	<i>Science Ed.</i>	<i>Environmental Ed</i>	<i>Service Learning</i>	<i>Outdoor Recreation</i>	<i>Possible Collaboration</i>
Gold Trader Flat & Yuba-Feather Historical Museum	Forbestown	Life-size gold rush mining town and Maidu exhibits	x					shared exhibits, speaker series, school program
Turtle Bay Exploration Park	Redding	Turtle Bay Museum contains permanent and changing exhibits related to the area's natural history, cultural history, art and science, including a tank for viewing fish underwater, a recreation of a Native American bark house, hands-on science displays and art creations. Outdoor exhibits focus on the timber and logging industries in California and the railroads.	x	x	x	x	x	nature program, school programs, speaker series
Community Memorial Museum of Sutter County	Yuba City	Collection includes John Sutter's gun and Maidu artifacts. Emphasis on agricultural history of California.	x		x			shared exhibits

5 Visitation and Visitor Use

Several key factors need to be considered before undertaking major interpretive projects. This section provides data concerning several facets of park visitation, including park access, general visitor makeup, visitor experiences, visitor responses, and current and potential user groups.

Visitation Data

In order to discern the needed information regarding visitors, BMSHP conducted a visitor survey between August and November 2013. A total of ninety-five respondents took part in this survey, which shed light on the general makeup and experience of park visitors. This survey is in no way definitive and, therefore, the conclusions in this section also make use of official CSP reporting documents, stakeholder meetings, and informal information collected by park staff.

Visitor Access and Orientation

Park Information

The public learns about BMSHP through several means. The majority of guests cite word of mouth as their primary source of learning about the park. This includes suggestions from family and friends, recommendations from other State Parks and nearby interpretive providers, or information gathered from time spent living in the area. Websites provide the next most frequent method of visitor information. Controlled web information includes a State Parks page maintained through parks.ca.gov, and a Facebook page updated by park staff. A website run by the Bidwell Mansion Association also includes visitation information about the park. Information available online that is not provided under CSP direction includes sites such as AAA, various hotels, and regional tourism organizations. Most of these sites contact the park in order to maintain current information, but there are several that provide out of date or wrong information that can be confusing for visitors. Visitors have also noted finding information from State Parks literature or tourism guidebooks that list the park.

Park Access

Vehicles can access the park via the entrance and parking lot connected to the Esplanade. The entrance is not closed or gated and is always accessible. Signs posted on Highway 99 and throughout Chico cue drivers to the park's location and direct them to the entrance, with varying degrees of success. Visitors are prompted to exit

at 1st Avenue, but for those travelling south there is no directional signage telling them what direction to turn at the bottom of the off-ramp. Visitors traveling south on the Esplanade or crossing westbound from Memorial Way can easily turn into the park and are guided for the most part by clear signage. However, directional signage is missing at the key intersection of 1st Avenue and the Esplanade. Visitors traveling north on the Esplanade, coming from downtown Chico, often encounter difficulties when trying to reach the park entrance. There is no left hand turn directly from the Esplanade into the park entrance. Visitors must make a left onto W. Frances Willard Avenue and then make another immediate left onto a frontage street that runs parallel to the Esplanade and leads to the park entrance. The signage is confusing and visitors often end up lost in the residential neighborhoods surrounding W. Frances Willard Avenue. Taken together, the signage directing visitors to the Mansion is at best inconsistent, and at worse ineffective.

The parking lot consists of thirty parking spaces, two of which are designated for handicapped parking. BMSHP spaces are marked "Bidwell Mansion Parking Only". CSUC buildings, primarily the Gateway Science Museum, and parking are also accessed through the same entrance. This creates a certain level of ambiguity for guests as to where to park. People accessing the university often park in BMSHP spaces. During high use days at the park, this can lead to a shortage of parking spaces for visitors. A designated space exists for bus parking. The lines and writing on the ground has all faded significantly and is difficult to read.

Vehicles also pass through the park via Sol-Wil-Le-No Avenue, which runs through the south end of the park and connects to the Esplanade and Arcadian Avenue. This road provides no parking or vehicle access to the park.

The park is also open to pedestrians and cyclists. These visitors can enter and exit the park from the primary entrance off the Esplanade, from the CSUC campus bordering the park to the west, and from downtown Chico via a bridge over Big Chico Creek. A paved bike/pedestrian path runs through the park east to west. It begins at the Esplanade entrance, runs through the park between the mansion and the Visitor Center, and continues onto campus. The park sits atop a heavily used thoroughfare for people entering or exiting the CSUC campus or downtown Chico.

Visitor Orientation

A large sign reading "Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park" greets visitors entering the park from the Esplanade. The sign is very old and faded, making it a difficult to read from a distance. As guests unload from the parking lot they are greeted with a clear view of the mansion, visitor center, and most of the park. A newly updated sign clearly marks the Visitor Center. An interpretive marquee posted outside the Visitor

Center displays information regarding tour times and prices and has a space for advertising upcoming events. Free BMSHP brochures are available next to the marquee and are available to the public even when the park is closed.

When open, the majority of guests begin their visit in the Visitor Center. Some guests go straight to the mansion and are directed back to the Visitor Center for tours by a sign on the front door. However, this is the only sign directing guests to the visitor center, and it is often missed. In the Visitor Center, park staff or volunteers welcome guests, provide any needed orientation, and answer any questions the public may have. When the Visitor Center is not open, most guests view the marquee and then make their way to other areas of the park. CSP staff occasionally interact with visitors on the grounds in the course of other activities and provide orientation or engage in informal interpretation.

A paved circular driveway leads from the bike path to the front of the mansion, but is blocked off to vehicles by removable bollards. A brick path also leads to the carriage shed, the rear of the house, and provides ADA access to the mansion. Besides these pathways, there are no specific circulation routes or trails.

Visitor Profile

Demographic Sketch⁵³

CSP attendance figures from the past ten years report an average annual attendance of more than 40,000 visitors. Of these, an annual average of around 9,500 attended paid interpretive programs. When free interpretive attendees and those who may have gone unrecorded are included, well over 10,000 people annually take part in organized interpretive opportunities at BMSHP. The remaining number of visitors includes intentional visitors who take part in non-interpretive activities such as site-seeing, photography, and picnics, as well as casual visitors who stumble upon the park or who briefly stop at the park on their way into town and campus.

Most visitors, including 30% of survey respondents, come from Chico and the surrounding Butte County area. Many others are visiting local residents and visit either with locals or on their recommendation. About 80% of survey respondents came from California, but visitors also came from various other states, as well as foreign countries such as Australia, Korea, and France.

Only 29% of survey respondents listed the park as their primary destination. Therefore, in most instances visitors are stopping at the mansion as part of a larger

⁵³ See Appendix for more complete survey data.

itinerary. The majority, 87.4% of those surveyed, came to the mansion with family or friends. Only a small number came alone or as part of an outing or commercial tour. Most guests are visiting the park for the first time, including about 70% of those surveyed.

As revealed in the survey, most visitors are older, with 58% of those recorded being 45 years or older. In terms of ethnicity, 77.9% of respondents identified themselves as White, 6.3% as Hispanic, 3.2% as Asian, 3.2% as American Indian, 2.1% as Black, and 7.4% as "Other" or "Declined to State". Many visitors have a relatively high level of education with 38.9% of those surveyed having completed an undergraduate degree and 33.7% having completed a graduate degree. 20% of respondents reported an annual household income of greater than \$80,000.

The vast majority of visitors speak English, either as a native language or fluently. Of visitors who do not speak English, Spanish is the most common language encountered. Many foreign students of Japanese and Korean origin visit the mansion from CSUC and have a basic level of English comprehension. Other languages encountered include French, German, Mandarin, and Arabic.

Visitor Expectations and Experiences

Most visitors to BMSHP can be considered casual visitors with no special interest in John and Annie Bidwell or the history of the mansion. Only 5 survey respondents considered themselves to have known a great deal about the Bidwells prior to their visit. Most responded that they had little to no prior knowledge.

Most visitors to BMSHP cite the guided tours of the mansion as their primary reason for visiting. Visitors expressed interest in topics covered in existing interpretive opportunities, including the history of the home, nature, the Mechoopda Indians, and the history of the Victorian Era.

Overall, visitors voiced a high degree of satisfaction with their experience at the park. The majority of survey respondents reported an increased level of interest in the Bidwells following their visit. Guests particularly highlight the high competency of the tour guides as a major reason for their positive experience.

Visitors expressed an interest in learning more about certain topics via means other than the regular guided tours. These suggestions include guest speakers, living history programs, demonstrations, and specialty tours. Guests also suggested more interactive displays and material oriented towards younger audiences.

Current User Groups

The following are some of the most common identified user groups to BMSHP:

Family and Friend Groups: The majority of visitors attended the park with and/or on the recommendation of family or friends.

School Groups: These are school groups who are attending one of the specially designed school tours or programs offered at the park. Classes are primarily 3rd and 4th grade, although some middle and high school groups attend as well.

College Groups: Many students will visit the park as part of classes held at CSUC and Butte College. Several geography classes require students to visit the park and several history instructors offer extra credit to students who attend a guided tour. Many foreign students visit the park as part of their English immersion program. Recreation classes have also taken special tours in order to see examples of historic interpretation.

Nature Enthusiasts: The exotic historic trees of the park attract numerous visitors. These visitors may attend a guided tour, but they may also self-tour the grounds or attend talks held on the grounds by CSUC staff or local experts.

Special Group Tours: These are organized groups who reserve a tour or activity at the park. These groups include senior groups, social organizations, and businesses and many are travelling from outside of the Butte County area. In the 2013 calendar year, seventeen of these groups visited BMSHP.

Photographers: Bidwell Mansion is a popular location for both amateur and professional photographers. The mansion is especially popular for engagement, wedding, and quinceañera photo sessions.

Artists: Many artists use the mansion as a subject for their works. Plein air painters often set up on the lawn in order to paint the home. Several organized painting events have been held at the park.

Missing or Potential User Groups

Visitors in Transit: This group consists of people who are passing through the park on their way to other locations. This includes cyclists, joggers, and roller bladers who spend very little time in the park. This is a large pool of potential interpretive attendees who are currently missed.

Geocachers: One active geocache is located on the property and is visited at least once a month. This cache was not placed by CSP staff. If BMSHP were to maintain a cache it could provide an opportunity for interpretation.

7 Interpretive Direction

Mission, Purpose, and Vision Statements

California State Parks Mission Statement

To provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.

California State Parks Interpretive Mission Statement

Interpretation is a special form of communication that helps people understand, appreciate, and emotionally connect with the rich natural and cultural heritage preserved in parks. It is the mission of interpretation in California State Parks to convey messages that initially will help visitors value their experience, and that ultimately will foster a conservation ethic and promote a dedicated park constituency.

California State Parks Educational Mission Statement

The most powerful forms of education are meaningful, involve the student, promote critical thinking, and appeal to different learning styles. Our mission is to provide educational experiences both in California State Parks and in the classroom, assisting educators with curriculum needs and offering activities that enable students to investigate, research, and participate in interactive learning.

Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park Declaration of Purpose

The purpose of the Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park, located in the City of Chico, is to provide for the people an opportunity to view the home of Mr. and Mrs. John Bidwell, and to understand the contributions they made to the social, cultural and economic heritage of California by making available to present and future generations the Bidwell home, an outstanding example of Victorian era architecture.

The function of the Department of Parks and Recreation at Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park is to foster the preservation, restoration, and interpretation of the Bidwell home, and to develop interpretive displays depicting the personalities and events associated with this structure and the surrounding historical sites.

Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park Mission for Interpretation

The interpretive mission of BMSHP is to create for current and future generations a deeper awareness and understanding of the lives of John and Annie Bidwell and their important contributions to the social, cultural, and economic heritage of California. The park provides a tangible connection between the past and the present by making available the Bidwell's historic home and by creating and presenting high quality interpretation.

Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park Vision for Interpretation

BMSHP will utilize trained staff and volunteers, a variety of methods, new technology, and up-to-date research to develop high quality interpretation that fosters a sense of appreciation, stewardship, and a desire to learn more about the lives and legacies of John and Annie Bidwell.

Interpretive Goals and Guidelines

Goals and Guidelines do not appear to exist in any meaningful form in the General Plan. Goals have been drafted for the purposes of this document.

Interpretative Themes and Periods

Interpretive Themes

Unifying Theme:

BMSHP connects visitors to the lives and legacies of John and Annie Bidwell, the world in which they lived, and their contributions to the social, cultural, and economic heritage of California.

Primary Themes and Supporting Themes:

John and Annie Bidwell are important figures for the entire state of California, not just for the city of Chico.

John and Annie Bidwell made significant contributions to the social heritage of California.

John and Annie Bidwell made significant contributions to the cultural heritage of California.

John and Annie Bidwell made significant contributions to the economic heritage of California.

Secondary Themes:

The Bidwell Mansion is a significant example of Italian Villa architecture.

The Mechoopda Maidu Indians are a vital part of our history and their relationship with the Bidwells proved important for both parties.

The local natural environment has undergone a significant transformation since the early 1800s.

The Bidwells maintained complex and important relationships with many of the region's cultural groups.

Interpretative Periods

The primary interpretive period for BMSHP is 1841-1918. This represents the period from the year in which John Bidwell came to California, through the major events of his life, and up to the death of Annie Bidwell.

People and events before and after those dates that relate to BMSHP should also be interpreted, but should be given less emphasis. This could include the early life of John Bidwell, the lives and world of the Mechoopda Maidu before contact, the various uses of the mansion following Annie's death, and many other subjects as they relate to the park's interpretive themes.

The interpretive period for Bidwell Mansion is 1868-1900. This ranges from the completion of the mansion through the death of John Bidwell. During that time the mansion remained relatively unchanged. After John's death the building underwent several major structural changes.

Educational Framework and Standards

BMSHP adheres to California State Parks' mandate to align educational programs with California Department of Education Frameworks and Standards. School programs are aimed towards 3rd and 4th grade level history and social science content standards as these standards correlate with the park's interpretive themes.⁵⁷ These programs allow students to learn about California and local history in a place-based setting. This fact, coupled with the programs' traditional hands-on approach, pertains to various learning styles and compliments classroom instruction of history and social sciences.

⁵⁷ See Appendix for a list of relevant content standards.

BMSHP is also mandated by the California Education Code and the California Public Resources Code to incorporate Environmental Principles and Concepts outlined in the California Education and Environment Initiative (EEI) curriculum into all K-12 environmental education related materials. Common CORE standards are also mandated for California education. BMSHP staff are exploring how to incorporate these principles and concepts into current and future programs.

8 Recommendations

The **Recommendations** section presents solutions for improving, enhancing and expanding interpretive services and operations at Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park. These solutions are stated in the form of Goals, Objectives, Strategies, and Tasks. Together, these elements provide the road map that will guide the development of future interpretive programs and services.

Terminology

Goals - Goals build off the vision and mission statements of California State Parks and Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park. Goals are broad, general concepts that describe the ultimate purpose, aim, or intent of interpretation at the park. Goals are not necessarily measurable. They are the big picture, the overall results the interpretation should achieve.

Objectives - Objectives are specific, realistic, and measurable results that interpretation will achieve and that contribute to the accomplishment of a goal.

Strategies - Strategies are the approaches used to accomplish one or more objectives. Strategies are specific and measurable.

Tasks - Tasks are the specific steps needed to carry out particular strategies. The Interpretation Action Plan (IAP) organizes the tasks with larger projects.

*Goal 1 – **Visitors**: The focus of interpretation will remain on visitors and their experience.*

- **1.1: Objective – Access** – BMSHP and its interpretive opportunities will be accessible to all visitors.
 - 1.1.1: Develop, and make available, non-English interpretive material.
 - A. Identify and utilize community groups that could provide assistance in creation of non-English materials.
 - 1.1.2: Develop, and make available, appropriate (ADA) interpretive material.
 - A. Produce a more accessible and effective ADA video tour.
 - 1.1.3: Develop Strategies for making all events, programs, and areas of the grounds accessible.
 - 1.1.4: Provide for basic visitor comforts and amenities.
 - A. Bike Racks
 - 1.1.5: Develop strategies for adjusting tours for sight and hearing impaired.
- **1.2: Objective – Orientation** – Park staff and infrastructure will properly orient and direct visitors to interpretive opportunities.
 - 1.2.1: Improve park orientation signage
 - A. Update front entrance sign from Esplanade.
 - B. Improve signage directing visitors from Highway 99.
 - C. Improve orientation signage around the Visitor Center.
 - D. Improve orientation signage directing visitors from W. Frances Willard, northbound on Esplanade, and from E. 1st Ave.
 - E. Improve orientation signage around mansion directing visitors to Visitor Center.
 - 1.2.2: Develop systems for better utilization of Visitor Center marquee.
 - 1.2.3: Develop and implement orientation tools utilizing mobile technology.
 - A. Utilize QR codes with current park orientation information.
 - B. Include updated orientation information on website.
- **1.3: Objective – Hospitality** – BMSHP and staff will foster an atmosphere of hospitality that creates a sense of interest and anticipation for interpretive opportunities.
 - 1.3.1: Appropriately prepare staff and volunteers to provide exceptional visitor service.
 - A. Review, update, and improve training and orientation.
 - B. Protocols
 - C. Business Practices
 - D. Materials

- 1.3.2: Increase interaction with visitors throughout the park grounds.
 - A. Implement planned roving interpretation.
 - B. Utilize a volunteer greeter to welcome visitors on the grounds.
- 1.3.3: Create and maintain opportunities for personal access and interaction with staff and volunteers.
- **1.4: Objective – Feedback – BMSHP will seek out and appropriately respond to visitor feedback.**
 - 1.4.1: Identify and utilize effective methods of surveying park visitors.
 - A. Develop, and make available to the public, a formal, generic survey.
 - B. Make surveys available in the V.C., either with a hardcopy paper form or ideally with an electronic form on a tablet or computer.
 - C. Place a guest log book at front counter.
 - 1.4.2: Utilize internet resources to elicit public feedback and communication.
 - A. Designate a single staff member to coordinate internet feedback.
 - B. Maintain and regularly update park Facebook page.
 - C. Include feedback capability on park website.
 - 1.4.3: Establish methods for staff response to feedback
 - A. Create a formal training manual for staff that includes consistent instruction on guidelines and procedures for handling visitor feedback.
 - B. Utilize a guide log book, to allow guides to share experiences, comments, and methods.
 - 1.4.3: Review and discuss visitor feedback at regular staff meetings.
- **1.5: Objective – Promotion/Advertising – BMSHP will pursue and maintain effective strategies for promotion and advertisement of the park in order to attract visitors.**
 - 1.5.1: Maintain regular presence on electronic media, such as the park’s website and Facebook page.
 - 1.5.2: Disseminate Brochures to other local areas of interest.
 - A. Identify and create a list of popular and effective location for brochure.
 - 1.5.3: Implement strategies to encourage grassroots advertising.
 - A. Institute a stamp card/passport system that includes other CSP units or other local history attractions.
 - B. Create and distribute BMSHP bumper stickers.
 - C. Hold local contests.
 - 1.5.4: Collaborate with BMA to develop promotional items to be made available in gift store.
 - A. Create and distribute BMSHP bumper stickers.
 - 1.5.5: Expand promotion and advertising to include regions outside of local area.

*Goal 2 – **Partnership**: BMSHP will foster beneficial and collaborative relationships with organizations and with the community at large.*

- **2.1: Objective – Support** – BMSHP will create and maintain positive relationships with entities in order to support and further park operations.
 - 2.1.1: Work with other entities for the purposes of fund raising for park interpretation.
 - A. Establish regular communication with the BMA in order to identify and propose future funding needs.
 - 2.1.2: Work with other entities in order to advance the park’s volunteer corps.
 - A. Develop formal relationships with relevant personnel and departments at Butte College and CSUC in order to solicit volunteers and internships.
 - 2.1.3: Develop relationships with local government agencies/entities.
- **2.2: Objective – Collaboration** – Create a positive open relationship with other entities for the purpose of creating interpretive opportunities.
 - 2.2.1: Work with other local interpretive providers.
 - A. Examine possibilities of collaboration for joint school programs and summer programs.
 - 2.2.2: Develop a network to improve communication and collaboration with other interpretive providers.
 - A. Institute a stamp card/passport system that includes other CSP units or other local history attractions.
 - 2.2.3: Work with other existing community organizations and events, such as CARD.
 - 2.2.4: Utilize BMA volunteer circle to assist with events and programs.
- **2.3: Objective – Media** – Create an open and positive relationship with media sources in order to promote the park and interpretive opportunities.
 - 2.3.1: Designate a single staff member to coordinate media interactions.
 - 2.3.2: Reach out to various media personnel to increase their awareness and connection to BMSHP.
 - A. Conduct a special media tour.
 - B. Create and maintain a media index list.
 - 2.3.3: Regularly utilize media resources.
 - A. Create a yearly media marketing plan.
 - 2.3.4: Tap into existing CSP and California State Parks Foundation media resources.

- **2.4: Objective – Resource** – BMSHP will be a resource for aiding other interpretive entities and individuals, for the purpose of building meaningful interpretive relationships.
 - 2.4.1: BMSHP will offer interpretive training to other entities.
 - A. Develop group specific interpretive training programs.
 - 2.4.2: Advertise to other entities that we can help with training or operations
 - 2.4.3: Develop system to share experiences with other entities

*Goal 3 – **Operations**: BMSHP will put in place structures and procedures that will maintain readiness for interpretation at the park.*

- **3.1: Objective – Staff** – In order to maintain a high quality of interpretation, BMSHP should ensure an appropriate level of staff and training.
 - 3.1.1: Review, update, and improve interpretive training and orientation materials.
 - 3.1.2: Better establish formal and informal review of interpretive staff.
 - A. Regularly utilize the RAPPORT system.
 - B. Conduct regular peer shadowing and feedback.
 - 3.1.3: Hold regular staff meetings.
 - A. Schedule and hold regular monthly staff meetings.
 - 3.1.4: Conduct regular evaluation of staff needs.
 - 3.1.5: Ensure opportunities for all staff to attend training conducted by CSP and other entities.
 - A. Identify funding sources to cover training costs.
 - B. Develop system of locating and informing staff about upcoming training opportunities.
- **3.2: Objectives – Volunteers** – BMSHP will maintain and grow a dedicated corps of volunteers to assist and supplement staff in interpretation.
 - 3.2.1: Designate a dedicated volunteer coordinator.
 - A. Provide CSP training for volunteer coordinator.
 - B. Develop formal procedures for staff feedback relating to volunteers.
 - 3.2.2: Develop formal training and orientation for volunteers.
 - 3.2.3: Conduct regular formal evaluation and review of volunteers.
 - 3.2.4: Develop formal methods of communicating with volunteers.
 - 3.2.5: Expand available opportunities for volunteers (i.e. a variety of different roles and jobs they can perform).
 - 3.2.6: Advertise for needed volunteer positions.
 - 3.2.7: Ensure regular formal volunteer recognition.
 - A. Ensure press coverage of volunteer achievements and recognition.
- **3.3: Objective – Collections** – Acquire, protect, and interpret collections according to the SOCS and accepted museum protocols.
 - 3.3.1: Increase staff awareness and understanding of collections.
 - A. Create an inventory and guide to the artifact room available to staff on SharePoint.

- B. Conduct regular staff reviews of objects.
 - 3.3.3: Collaborate and coordinate with other collection institutions.
 - A. Coordinate with CSUC Special Collections for indexing photos and obtaining copies of materials.
 - B. Identify special collections for potential loans during special events.
 - 3.3.4: Better utilize Native American collection, for interpretive purposes.
- **3.4: Objective – Facilities – Facilities will be organized and updated for the best advantage of interpretation.**
 - 3.4.1: Update/rearrange/rotate collection in mansion for interpretive freshness, based on curatorial guidelines.
 - 3.4.2: Better utilize space in the mansion.
 - A. Reorganize “sewing room” for more effective storage, interpretation, and use during special events.
 - 3.4.3: Remodel Visitor Center interpretive displays.
 - A. Remodel the exhibit hall.
 - B. Label pictures in the theater.
 - C. Create new exhibits for rotating display case.
 - D. Incorporate new, smart, and interactive technology.
 - 3.4.4: Expand/update/maintain equipment for in-house interpretation and interpretive readiness.
 - A. Provide all computers access to printers, primarily color printers.
 - 3.4.5: Expand and improve in house library resources.
 - A. Increase the number of bookcases and improve their placement and organization.
 - B. Create an accurate index of library collection and make it available to staff.
 - C. Establish an accountable system for checking out and tracking library resources.
 - 3.4.6: Better organize interpretive storage space.
 - A. Clean and organize costume room.
 - B. Organize interpretive closet.
 - C. Make AV room better organized and more efficient.
 - D. Reorganize Architects Home for better storage and utilization.
 - E. Clarify the proper use of Artifact Storage Room for interpretive objects and materials.
- **3.5: Objective – Research – Staff will conduct research and disseminate information to improve interpretive materials and programs.**
 - 3.5.1: Provide for staff research opportunities at other institutions
 - 3.5.2: Create and update a research topics list.
 - 3.5.3: Make research resources more easily accessible to staff.
 - A. Create an accessible index to letter and photo collections.

- B. Create a research bibliography.
 - C. Obtain membership to databases, such as ancestry.com or JSTOR.
- 3.5.4: provide regular updates in research findings
- **3.6: Objectives – Research – BMSHP will become a leading source for information about the Bidwells.**
 - 3.6.1: Gather information and copies of materials from other institutions.
 - 3.6.2: Develop methods for public access to research resources
 - A. Make diaries available for research.
 - B. Create materials that will aid in public research.
 - C. Create a catalog of research materials that is available online.
 - 3.6.3: Develop/maintain staff experience and expertise in research and specific subject matter.
 - 3.6.4: Advertise access to BMSHP’s library collection.
 - 3.6.6: Staff will participate in Bidwell related discussions (i.e. publications, talks, news articles).
- **3.7: Objective – Revenue – BMSHP will actively pursue revenue generating opportunities and operations will be conducted in a fiscally responsible manner.**
 - 3.7.1: BMSHP will create more wedding/celebration special event opportunities.
 - A. Contact other successful entities in order to gather helpful information.
 - 3.7.2: Utilize more volunteers for events in order to offset staff requirements.
 - 3.7.3: Create fiscal tracking and assessment methods.
 - 3.7.4: Expand advertisement and outreach.
 - A. Designate a dedicated staff member.
- **3.8: Objective – Administration – BMSHP will develop and maintain park specific administrative procedures and systems.**
 - 3.8.1: Create a more unified scheduling system for special tours, events, and school groups.
 - 3.8.2: Improve organization of front desk materials.
 - 3.8.3: Create methods/systems for circulating information among staff.
 - A. Utilize a guide log book.

Goal 4 – Connection, Inspiration, and Stewardship – Interpretation will connect visitors to the park’s important cultural, natural, and recreational resources and will foster a sense of inspiration and stewardship.

- **4.1: Objective – Mansion Tours** – BMSHP will continue to provide historically accurate and provocative guided tours of Bidwell Mansion.
 - 4.1.1: Keep tours focused around Primary Themes.
 - 4.1.2: Research viability of having the Visitor Center and mansion tours open more days of the week.
 - A. Contact CSUC for potential student research project.
- **4.2: Objective – Schools** – BMSHP will optimize educational opportunities for school-age children, and will instill a life-long appreciation for the Bidwells, their home, and lifestyles of the time period.
 - 4.2.1: Designate a dedicated school program coordinator.
 - 4.2.2: Coordinate and collaborate with educators.
 - A. Conduct a special tour for educators.
 - 4.2.3: Develop systems for pre/post trip assessment.
 - A. Create a teacher survey in order to receive feedback.
 - 4.2.4: Expand the number of programs offered.
 - 4.2.5: Provide for relevant staff DPR Training.
 - 4.2.6: Develop and update programs according to current content standards (including EEI/CORE).
 - 4.2.7: Present programs and materials that are age appropriate.
 - 4.2.8: Seek to increase the overall number of school groups visiting BMSHP.
 - 4.2.9: Develop an offsite school assembly.
 - A. Research viability of designing and conducting a school assembly.
- **4.3: Objective – Experience** – The visitor experience will be new and exciting and create a desire to return.
 - 4.3.1: Staff should revisit tours for purpose of keeping tours fresh and relevant.
 - A. Incorporate new and timely information into existing tours and programs.
 - B. Develop systems for disseminating new information specific for tours
 - 4.3.2: Maintain awareness of and incorporate new interpretive strategies/methods.
 - A. Take advantage of outside training opportunities.

- B. Associate with interpretive organizations and interpretive newsletters (i.e. N.A.I.).
- **4.4: Objective – Agriculture** – BMSHP will interpret the past and present importance of agriculture in California in general and the region specifically.
 - 4.4.1: Bidwell’s contributions to California’s agricultural history will be highlighted.
- **4.5: Objective – Response** – BMSHP will create and advertise systems and opportunities for visitors to act on and follow up on their increased sense of inspiration and stewardship.
 - 4.5.1: Provide means and opportunities for visitors to follow-up on their visit.
 - A. Create an email list for visitors to learn more.
 - B. Create materials with Information regarding opportunities/upcoming events.
 - C. Utilize visitor feedback
 - D. At end of tours, encourage visitors to tell others.
 - E. Set up a special table in V.C. providing information about opportunities to follow up.
- **4.6: Objective – Diverse Groups** – BMSHP will increase interpretation focusing on historic cultural groups related to the Bidwell story.
 - 4.6.1: Where appropriate tie interpretation into larger group recognition events and times.

*Goal 5 – **Expand and Diversify** – BMSHP will offer a variety of interpretive opportunities for a diversity of audiences.*

- **5.1: Objective – Technology** – Interpretation will utilize new technology.
 - 5.1.1: Update V.C. to include interactive displays.
 - 5.1.2: Develop interpretive material for mobile applications.
 - 5.1.3: Incorporate interpretation into new recreation technology.
 - A. Geocaching
 - 5.1.4: Create park website and include interpretive aspects.
 - A. Design interactive interpretive web activities.
- **5.2: Objective – Special Interpretation** – BMSHP will create, advertise, and hold special interpretive opportunities.
 - 5.2.1: BMSHP will undertake a process of identifying potential special interpretation opportunities and will regularly revisit this list.
 - 5.2.2: Identify outside community events that BMSHP can take part in.
 - 5.2.3: Host traveling interpretive exhibits.
 - 5.2.4: Employ a variety of interpretive methods (i.e. roving interpretation, living history, etc.) at the park.
- **5.3: Objective – Special Events** – Where appropriate, interpretation will be incorporated into non-interpretive special events held at the park.
 - 5.3.1: Develop specific interpretive materials to hand out/display at Special Events.
 - A. Utilize marquee.
 - 5.3.2: Undertake a process of identifying what opportunities exist and how interpretation could be incorporated. Make this available to staff members.
- **5.4: Objective – Children** – Provide new Interpretive opportunities for children of all ages.
 - 5.4.1: Increase interpretative opportunities for children throughout the year.
 - A. Design and hold summer programs at the park.
 - B. Work with Chico Creek Nature Center and other summer interpretive providers.
 - C. Hold Jr. Ranger programs at park.
 - D. Coordinate and collaborate with other local summer programs.
 - 5.4.2: Interpretation will be presented in age appropriate ways
 - A. Create more interactive interpretive activities that can be incorporated into children’s programs.

- **5.5: Objective – Non-Personal** – Expand and improve non-personal interpretation in order to reach a wider segment of the public.
 - 5.5.1: Update, improve, and create non-personal interpretation throughout grounds
 - A. Design interpretive materials for Carriage Shed.
 - B. Explore interpretive possibilities of south Visitor Center outside wall.
 - C. Update the system of tree labels.
 - D. Design a self-guided walking tour of grounds.
- **5.6: Objective – Natural Resources** – Natural Resource interpretation will be implemented at BMSHP.
 - 5.6.1: Develop and offer natural resources themed interpretive opportunities.
 - A. Work with Project Wet and Wild as potential partner.
 - 5.6.2: Where appropriate, incorporate natural resource interpretation into existing interpretive programs.
- **5.7: Objective – Audience** – BMSHP will design and hold interpretive opportunities that will appeal to diverse audiences.
 - 5.7.1: Adapt interpretation to a variety of special groups.
 - 5.7.2: Confer with trip leaders beforehand in order to better prepare and tailor programs for groups.