



News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Patriotic Grand Celebration – September 10, 2005

Columbia State Historic Park's Patriotic Celebration of California's Statehood

COLUMBIA – In 1850, when news reached California that the territory had been admitted as the 31st state, celebrations erupted throughout the towns of the Gold Rush. In the patriotic flair that was emblematic of the 19th century, towns celebrated with pomp, pageantry, brass bands, and flag waving.

155 years later, on Saturday, September 10th, 2005, the staff and volunteers of Columbia State Historic Park are planning a grand and gala re-enactment of those original celebrations, complete with brass band, gun salute, patriotic speeches and the raising of an authentic, hand sewn replica of the 31-star flag. The day will start off with a bang, with a special anvil firing at 10 a.m.

From 1 - 4 p.m., visitors to Columbia State Historic Park will have the opportunity to participate in many Gold Rush-era activities presented by the park's volunteers. In addition to activities offered daily by the park concessionaires, such as riding the stagecoach, panning for gold, and enjoying a sarsaparilla in the many saloons and restaurants in town, children and adults alike can enjoy washing laundry (in tubs, the old way), being sworn-in at the old courthouse, visiting the old schoolhouse, exchanging gold with the express agent, or playing with old-fashioned toys on the street.

The day's ceremonies begin at 10 a.m. with an anvil firing. The tradition of firing blacksmith's anvils in the air as a way to mark celebrations was carried west by early pioneers. Today anvil firing is such an obscure ritual that it is practiced in only a few select spots. To "fire" the anvil, the base anvil (or shooter) is upended on the ground and the forge handling hole is packed with black powder. The top anvil (or flyer) is inverted and placed upon the shooter. The fuse is then lit and 8 - 10 seconds later the powder will ignite, propelling the anvil into graceful flight, to land in a precisely calibrated spot.

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At 12:30 p.m., visitors will enjoy a free concert presented by the Great Mother Lode Brass and Reed Band. The program will feature the patriotic works of John Philip Sousa, sure to tug at the heartstrings of any patriot.

From 1 - 4 p.m., the Wilson-McConnell House will be open to the public for the first time in its 130-year history. This wood-framed house, across the street from the City Hotel, was recently purchased by California State Parks from the family of Geraldine McConnell, who lived in the house from 1940 until her death in 2003. During the Admission's Day event, visitors will be able to walk through the unfurnished house and submit suggestions for future plans for the building.

Originally, a wood-framed residence was built on the site in the 1850s by Mr. & Mrs. James Wilson, who operated a shoe store and a dry-goods store in the adjacent brick storefront. In the late 1870s, after her husband's death, Rose Wilson built a new 1½ story house on the lot. In 1940, Dr. James E. McConnell and his wife, Geraldine purchased and painstakingly restored the residence where they lived and raised their daughter Margaret.

James and Geraldine were instrumental in the founding of Columbia State Historic Park and on July 15, 1945, their residence was ceremonially called "The Governor's Mansion for a day" while the town celebrated the signing of the enacting legislation to create the historic park by Governor Earl Warren, who reportedly stayed at the residence. The home was made famous by the film industry for its appearance in the movie "High Noon." Dr. McConnell passed away in 1968 and Geraldine continued to live in the home until her death at age 99 in 2003. In addition to her many years of civic involvement, she was often seen sitting on her front porch with one of her beloved dogs, watching the world pass by.

Columbia is recognized as a historic resource of state and national significance. Columbia is home to the largest single collection of existing Gold Rush-era structures, and was designated as a National Historic Landmark District in 1961.

Columbia State Historic Park is located in downtown Columbia, approximately four miles north of Sonora, on Parrott's Ferry Road. Further information on Columbia State Historic Park may be obtained by visiting the California State Park website at www.parks.ca.gov.

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