Sonoma

State Historic Park

Our Mission

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The city of Sonoma is home to Sonoma State Historic Park—site of California's northernmost Franciscan mission and birthplace of the state's Bear Flag.

The historic, picturesque town of Sonoma is home to Sonoma State Historic Park—site of the northernmost Franciscan mission in California and birthplace of the California State Bear Flag. Located in the heart of the beautiful wine country between Napa and Santa Rosa off Highway 12, the town surrounds a central plaza (the largest of its kind in California), filled with charming shops and restaurants.

Unlike most parks with one plot of land and geographical boundaries, Sonoma State Historic Park is a series of historic attractions in several locations within the community. The park consists of six sites: the Mission San Francisco Solano, the Blue Wing Inn, the Sonoma Barracks, the Toscano Hotel, and Casa Grande and Lachryma Montis—two homes of General Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, Military Commander and Director of Colonization of the Northern Frontier.

Northernmost El Camino Real marker

MISSION SAN FRANCISCO SOLANO

Mission San Francisco Solano was the last mission established in California—the only one founded under Mexican governance. Padre José Altimira selected and consecrated the site on July 4, 1823.

San Francisco Solano was founded at Sonoma to convert Native Americans to Christianity. Members of the Coast and Lake Miwok, Pomo, Patwin, and Wappo tribes were baptized at the mission and used as a labor source.

Mission chapel and Padres' Quarters

On April 4, 1824, a temporary wooden chapel was dedicated, and the first baptisms were performed. In 1825, a long, low adobe wing for the Padres' Quarters was finished. Much neglected over the years and then partially reconstructed, the Padres' Quarters—east of the present chapel—is the oldest building in Sonoma.

Mission San Francisco Solano chapel altar

Father Buenaventura Fortuni, who lived at the Sonoma mission from 1826 to 1833, continued Father Altimira's work. Under his direction, the foundation for a large adobe church was laid just east of the Padres' Quarters in 1827. The Sonoma mission's sphere of influence reached its peak around 1832, with nearly 1,000 Native California Indians in residence and 10,000 acres of land used to raise crops and livestock.

In 1834, the Mexican government secularized all the missions into parish churches. After 11 years of existence, the Sonoma mission building began a decline that ended in its collapse in the late 1830s. A small adobe chapel on the west side of the Padres' Quarters, built and furnished by General Vallejo in 1840, replaced the original mission church.

Mission San Francisco Solano chapel

After 1881, the chapel and its adjoining residence buildings were sold by the church and used variously as a hay barn, a winery, and a blacksmith shop. William Randolph Hearst purchased the property in the early 1900s and then deeded it to the State. The buildings became State property in 1906, the same year they sustained major earthquake damage.

Basic restoration work began in 1909 and was carried out in various phases over the years. Archaeological investigation and restoration programs are undertaken from time to time under the State's direction.

Inside the present-day mission chapel, visitors can view exhibits of mission life, religious paintings, and artifacts—as well as beautiful framed watercolors of all the California missions by artist Chris Jorgensen. A monument was erected on the west side adjoining the mission chapel in 1999, honoring the 896 native people who are buried there. A Native American shaman and a bishop from the Catholic Church blessed this sacred burial site.

In a quiet courtyard behind the mission stand olive trees, a wall of cactus that dates back to mission days, and wooden benches around a small fountain where visitors can sit and rest. During scheduled school programs, students make Native American-style baskets and candles in the courtyard.

THE BLUE WING INN

This long, two-story adobe building just across from the mission chapel derives its name from a gambling saloon and hotel of the Gold Rush era. Portions of the building were originally constructed to house soldiers assigned to the Sonoma mission; these structures were joined together and a second story added at a later date. Among the most famous visitors to the Blue Wing Inn were noted actress Lotta Crabtree and U.S. Army officer Ulysses S. Grant (later to become the eighteenth U.S. president).

The Blue Wing Inn

The building was acquired by the State in 1968. Interested community groups support California State Parks in the planning, construction, interpretation, and potential rehabilitation of the Blue Wing Inn.

SONOMA BARRACKS

The two-story adobe barracks facing Sonoma's central plaza was built to house Mexican army troops after General Vallejo moved his garrison from the Presidio at San Francisco to Sonoma. Actual construction of the barracks probably took place in stages after the troops arrived in 1834, and was completed in 1841.

From 1834 to 1846, Sonoma was headquarters for the commandant of the Frontera del Norte—the northern Mexican provincial frontier.

In the years following 1835, more than 100 military expeditions set out from Sonoma with the object of subduing the Wappo and Cainameros or Satisyomis native groups. These tribes rose up more than once trying to overthrow Mexican domination of the territory around Sonoma.

During the days of the short-lived California Republic, the barracks housed a number of Republic followers until July 9, 1846, when the Stars and Stripes flag was first raised at Sonoma. Thereafter, various U.S. military forces used the barracks. In May 1849, a 37-man company of U.S. Dragoons moved into the building and established Camp Sonoma. Throughout the next few years, Sonoma continued to be an important army post.

Interior of the Sonoma Barracks

Solano chapel, Sonoma Barracks, Toscano Hotel, and Vallejo Home photos courtesy of Lee Nelson

Courtyard behind barracks

In 1860, Vallejo remodeled the barracks to serve as a winery. In later years under other owners, it was used as a store, a law office, and a private residence. The barracks building was purchased by the State in 1958 and partially restored.

A wheelchair-accessible indoor theater offers a video detailing the history of the mission, General Vallejo, and the Bear Flag Revolt. Visitors can also see a copy of the first Bear Flag, whose red-striped bottom border is said to have been made from a woman's petticoat.

For ten years, until 1844, the Presidial company of Sonoma was generally the most powerful military force in California.

Toscano Hotel

The Barracks store offers a variety of books and educational items on Native American life, Mexican and early American history, and the California missions.

CASA GRANDE

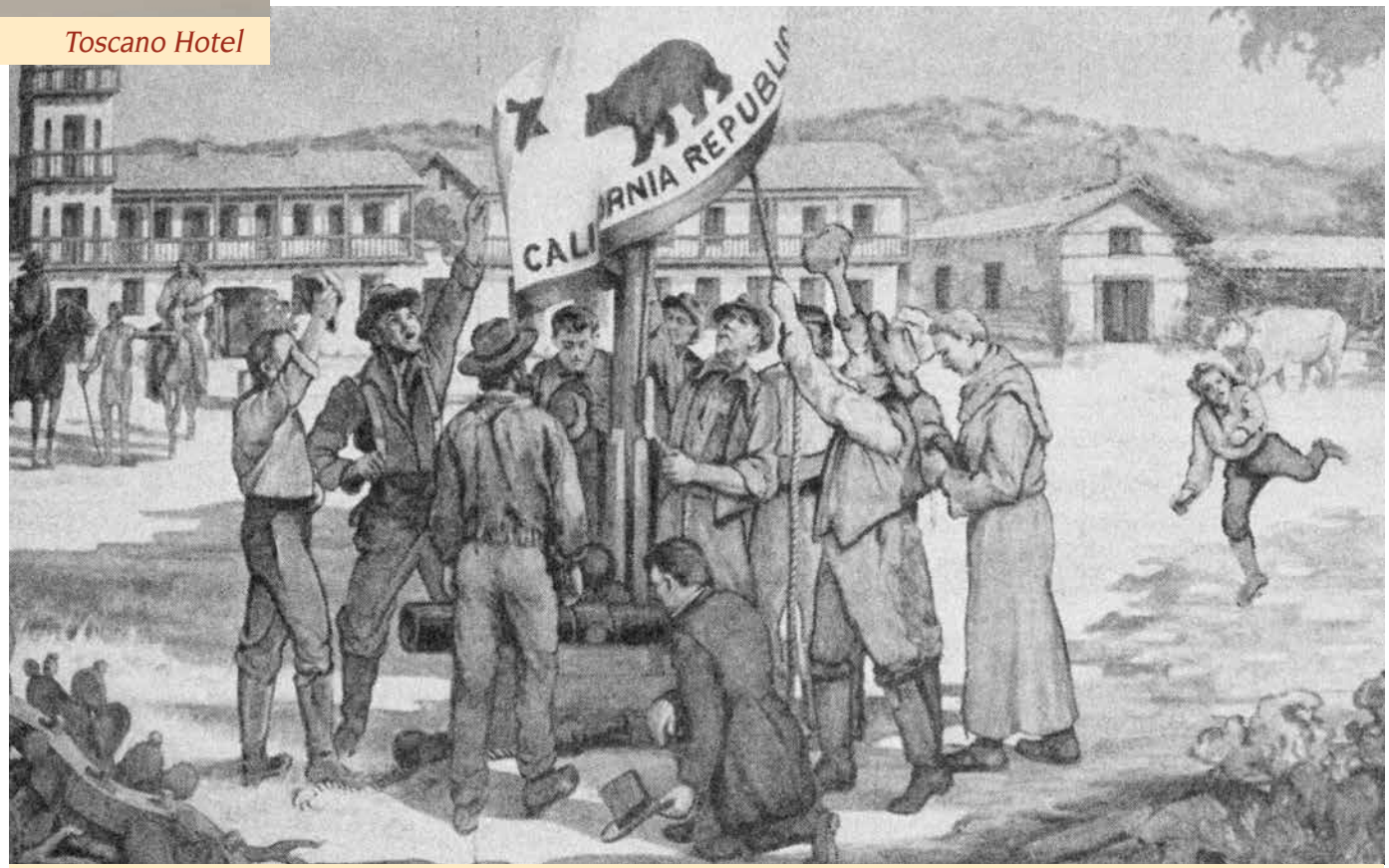
General Vallejo, who directed Sonoma's development until 1846, laid out the central Sonoma Plaza. He built his first home, the Casa Grande—one of the state's most imposing and well-furnished residences—next to the Sonoma Barracks. Casa Grande's wide second-story balcony overlooked the Plaza; the house was finished in 1840. Over the years, a continual stream of distinguished visitors from many parts of the world helped to make Casa Grande the center of social and diplomatic life north of San Francisco Bay.

On the morning of June 14, 1846, in a bid to "capture" the unarmed and unresisting Pueblo of Sonoma, a group of 30 to 40 American settlers and frontiersmen known as the Bear Flag Party "arrested" General Vallejo at Casa Grande and had him imprisoned at Sutter's Fort. They announced the establishment of a free and independent Republic of California and raised a new, homemade flag—the Bear Flag—in the Plaza over Sonoma.

Originally built in an L-shape, the main wing of Casa Grande was destroyed by fire on February 12, 1867. Only the two-story Servants' Quarters stands today.

TOSCANO HOTEL

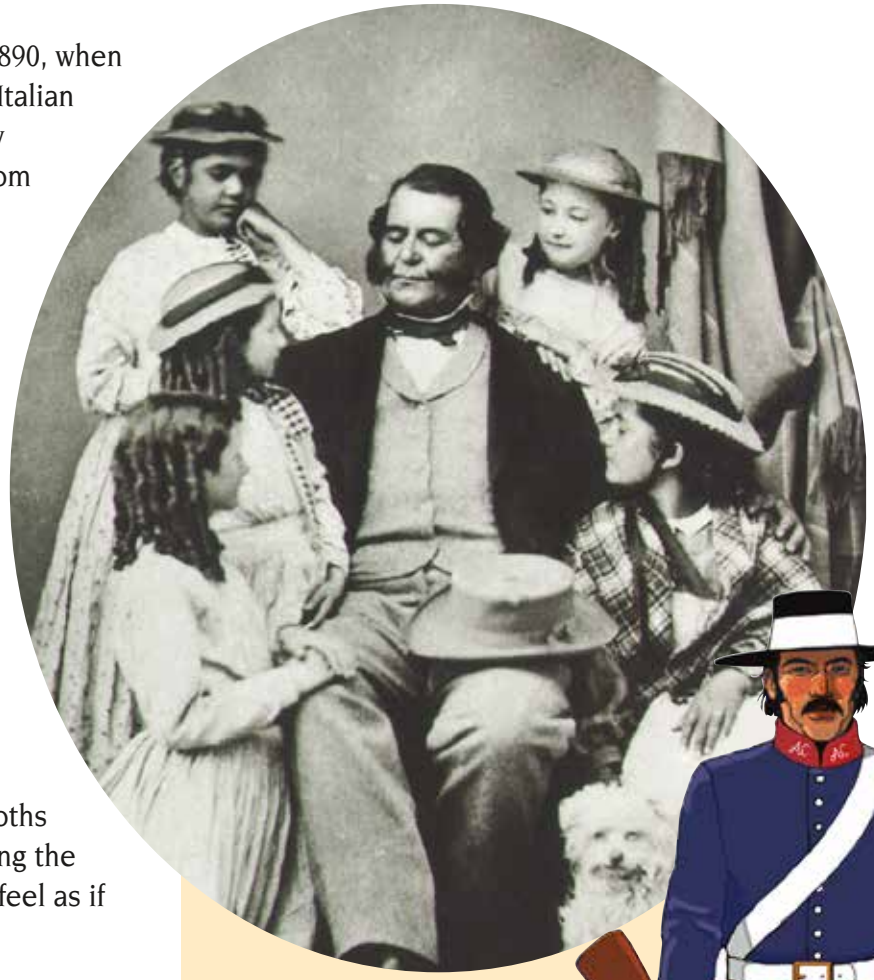
The wood-frame building between Casa Grande and the barracks was constructed during the 1850s, when it housed, among other things, a retail store, and rental library. Later the building served a



The raising of a new, homemade flag—the Bear Flag—in the Plaza over Sonoma

working-class clientele as an inexpensive hotel. Around 1890, when many hotel customers were Italian immigrants, the Ciucci family changed the hotel's name from "Eureka" to Toscano.

Today the Toscano is furnished with beautiful period furniture and looks much the way it did around the turn of the 20th century. A bar downstairs is set up with old card tables and chairs, and antique-framed photos and memorabilia dot the walls. Inside the kitchen and dining room (in a separate building behind the one facing the plaza), tables set with checkered cloths and a menu board announcing the day's specials make visitors feel as if lunch is about to be served.



Vallejo with two daughters and three granddaughters

Casa Grande Servants' Quarters

In order to serve as a buffer to Russian expansion from Fort Ross, Mexican soldiers came from the Presidio of San Francisco in 1834 and created a new military post on the northern frontier.

PLEASE REMEMBER

- Natural and cultural park features are protected by law and may not be disturbed or removed.
- Parking is available in the large lot behind the Toscano Hotel and Barracks.
- Restrooms are available in the mission and behind the Sonoma Barracks.
- The park provides tours for the general public and for school students. School tour reservations must be made at least two weeks in advance by calling (866) 240-4655.
- For a schedule of docent-led tours, please visit **www.parks.ca.gov** or call (707) 938-9560.
- Except for service animals, pets are not allowed in park buildings.

VALLEJO HOME—LACHRYMA MONTIS

General Vallejo, now an elected California State Senator, purchased acreage at the foot of the hills one-half mile northwest of Sonoma's central plaza in 1850. The land surrounded a free-flowing spring that the Indians had called *Chiucuyem* (tears of the mountain). Vallejo retained this name for his new estate, but translated it into Latin, *Lachryma Montis*.

The beautiful Gothic-style American-Victorian house began as a prefabricated wooden structure manufactured in the northeast and shipped around Cape Horn. Notable features of the home are the twin porches, dormer and Gothic windows, and fanciful ornamental trim along the eaves.

Near the main house, a special warehouse—also of prefabricated construction—was erected to store wine, fruit, and other produce. Eventually the half-timbered building was converted to residential use and came to be known as the "Chalet." Today the Chalet serves as the park's museum.

A stone and masonry reservoir developed by Vallejo for fresh water delivery was built behind the main house. It collected the water from the natural artesian springs in the hills (tears of the mountain). Other buildings on the property include the Hermitage (often called "Napoleon's Cottage" after General Vallejo's youngest son) atop a winding stone staircase behind the reservoir. Here Napoleon kept a menagerie of beloved pets—at one time totaling 14 dogs, several cats, and a parrot.

"El Delirio," whose name suggests a place of bliss and ecstasy, is the pretty garden pavilion west of the main home. Here, Vallejo rewrote his "La Historia de California." A lovely cast-iron swan fountain graces the front of the residence. Once used as a guest cottage, it invites visitors to stop and enjoy a few moments of tranquility.

Vallejo Home—Lachryma Montis

The Chalet Museum

The Vallejo home and about 20 acres of the original Lachryma Montis lands were acquired by the State in 1933, in order to protect and preserve this historic site. So significant are the site's grounds to understanding General Vallejo's influence that official plans guide their future care and interpretation.

NEARBY STATE PARKS

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- Jack London SHP, 2400 London Ranch Road, Glen Ellen 92345 (707) 938-5216
- Olompali SHP, 8901 Highway 101 Novato 94945 (415) 892-3383

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

The Sonoma Mission chapel, the first floor and detached kitchen of the Toscano Hotel, and the first floor of the Sonoma Barracks are accessible. Accessible restrooms are located in the courtyard behind the barracks. Historic doors and thresholds may require some assistance.

Montini Trail and the portion of the Sonoma bike and hike path within the park are accessible. Accessible parking spots are located behind the Sonoma Barracks.

This park is supported in part through a nonprofit organization. For more information, contact:
Sonoma Petaluma Parks, P.O. Box 1702, Sonoma, CA 95476 • **www.sonomaparks.org**

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