Leland Stanford Mansion

State Historic Park

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LELAND STANFORD MANSION
STATE HISTORIC PARK

Leland Stanford Mansion
State Historic Park

800 N Street
Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 324-0575

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"Mr. and Mrs. Leland Stanford present compliments and request the pleasure of your company at their residence."

—Invitation to the Stanford party of February 6, 1872

The Leland Stanford Mansion, a National Historic Landmark, upholds a long-honored tradition of service to the people of California. As the State's official reception center and a public museum, this California state park welcomes leaders from around the world.

In the turbulent 1860s—the Civil War and its aftermath—this elegant brick building was headquarters to three governors: Leland Stanford (1862-1863), Frederick F. Low (1863-1867), and Henry H. Haight (1867-1871). Prominent Sacramento merchant Shelton C. Fogus built the home during 1856-1857, then leased it for a short time to gold rush banker and entrepreneur Darius Ogden (D.O.) Mills. In June 1861, Leland Stanford, the new Republican candidate for governor, bought Fogus' furnished home—soon known as the Executive Mansion—for $8,000.

STANFORD-LATHROP FAMILIES

Born in 1824 near Albany, New York, Leland Stanford was the fifth of eight children. Although he showed an early talent for business, his parents guided his education toward a law career.

While apprenticed to a law firm, Stanford met Jane Eliza Lathrop, the oldest daughter of the Dyer Lathrop family, and subsequently became a regular visitor to their home.

Stanford set up a law practice in Wisconsin, and two years later he and Jane were married. The couple soon decided to move to California, but in June 1852, Leland had to leave Jane in New York to care for her ailing father. In July he arrived alone in San Francisco. Following a visit to his brothers—successful Sacramento merchants—Leland went into business with a long-time friend, Captain Nicholas T. Smith.

Portrait of Leland, Jane, and Leland Stanford, Jr., 1880
Photo courtesy of Stanford University Archives

During a three-year separation, the Stanfords wrote to each other regularly. In June 1855, having received news of Jane's father's death, Stanford returned to Albany to bring her home. By autumn they were living in a modest house along Sacramento's bustling waterfront, and Stanford was the sole owner of the Stanford Brothers Store.

BUSINESS AND POLITICS

Stanford's help in organizing the state's new Republican Party assured California's loyalty to the Union. His early gubernatorial campaigns had met with mixed success; nominated to run in 1859, he was defeated. In 1860 he worked on Abraham Lincoln's presidential campaign, and when Lincoln was elected, Stanford served briefly as one of his advisors.

In June of 1861, Stanford's reputation for common sense and sound judgment brought him the Republican Party's nomination for governor. Prior to that election, he had been named president of the newly incorporated Central Pacific

Restored elements of the mansion include carpets, Renaissance Revival furniture, gilded columns, gas globe lights, and original toys.

Photo of original toy courtesy of Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University, Stanford Family Collections

Railroad of California. Leland Stanford became one of "The Associates" (later known as the "Big Four") with Collis Huntington, Charles Crocker, and Mark Hopkins. Stanford's undeniable popularity won him the election on September 4, 1861.

Although suddenly thrust into the role of California's First Lady in the middle of the Civil War, Jane Stanford was more than ready. When it came to social affairs, she determined various rules of etiquette and presided over formal receptions, dinners, and celebrations.

Stanford dealt with the critical issues inherent in wartime. In an era when such actions were not incompatible with the office of governor, Stanford promoted legislation that backed the Central Pacific Railroad. He cut the state's debt in half and enacted laws dealing with the security of San Francisco's harbor. In 1863 he declined to run for office again. Because four-year terms had only recently become law, Stanford was the last California governor to serve a two-year term.

GOVERNORS LOW AND HAIGHT

Unassuming, pro-Union Frederick F. Low, his wife Mollie, and their five-year-old daughter Flora became the gubernatorial mansion's new tenants in 1863. During his term, Low defended Chinese immigration when it was an unpopular stance. He also signed an 1864 act accepting the Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Big Trees Grove from the federal government—the first time a government had set aside lands for public enjoyment.

In December 1867, Stanford rented the executive office to Democratic Governor-elect Henry H. Haight. Haight did not reside in the house, but used the office until he could move into the nearly completed State Capitol building. During his term, he supported the establishment of an eight-hour workday and the chartering of the University of California.

To this day, actions taken by these three capable governors in the Stanford Mansion affect the lives of Californians. The challenges they faced and the decisions they made prove that governing California was serious business in the nineteenth century.

THE STANFORD MANSION

Over the years, Mr. Fogus' original 4,000-square foot home eventually came to encompass 19,000 square feet. In 1862 the Stanfords added a governor's office to the home. In the fall of 1871, they began a major expansion of the two-story building. Much of the work involved raising it and adding a story below and a mansard-roofed story above. On February 6, 1872, the Stanfords celebrated the reopening of the house by inviting 700 guests to a party described by newspapers as "brilliantly dazzling."

A SON'S LEGACY

On May 14, 1868, Jane Stanford gave birth to their only child, Leland Stanford, Jr. An energetic, intelligent, and thoroughly adored child, Leland Jr. was the light of his parents' lives. In 1884, while visiting Europe, the boy

contracted typhoid fever. Despite the best care by Catholic nuns, he died in Florence, Italy, on March 13, 1884, at age 15.

Following the death of their son, the Stanfords decided that if they could not educate him, they would build an educational institution in his name. They endowed the Leland Stanford, Jr. University; on November 14, 1885, the new board of trustees accepted ownership of several properties that would become Stanford University.

In June 1893 Stanford, by then a United States Senator, died. It was fully expected that government claims on his estate would keep his widow from achieving their educational vision. However, the widow and the university found ways to economize, and the danger passed.

The Stanfords had always been generous, especially in children's causes. In 1900 Jane Stanford gave her residence and furnishings to the Catholic Bishop of Sacramento to be used as an orphanage. The Sisters of Mercy, and later the Sisters of Social Service, carefully adapted the building to their needs while keeping its essential features intact. In 1957 the house became a State Historical Landmark, and in 1978 the State of California purchased the property for use as a state park. In 1987 the Stanford Home for Children moved to a new facility.

Stanford Mansion, 1872

Photo courtesy of Stanford University Archives (color enhanced)

A MANSION TRANSFORMED

In 1991 the Leland Stanford Mansion Foundation was formed as part of a groundbreaking public/private fundraising partnership to help restore the home to its appearance during the Stanford family's residence. Historic photographs and archaeological and historical analyses have guided the restoration of the mansion's rich details, from crystal chandeliers and gleaming wood paneling to delicately painted brackets, gilded mirrors, and elaborate draperies.

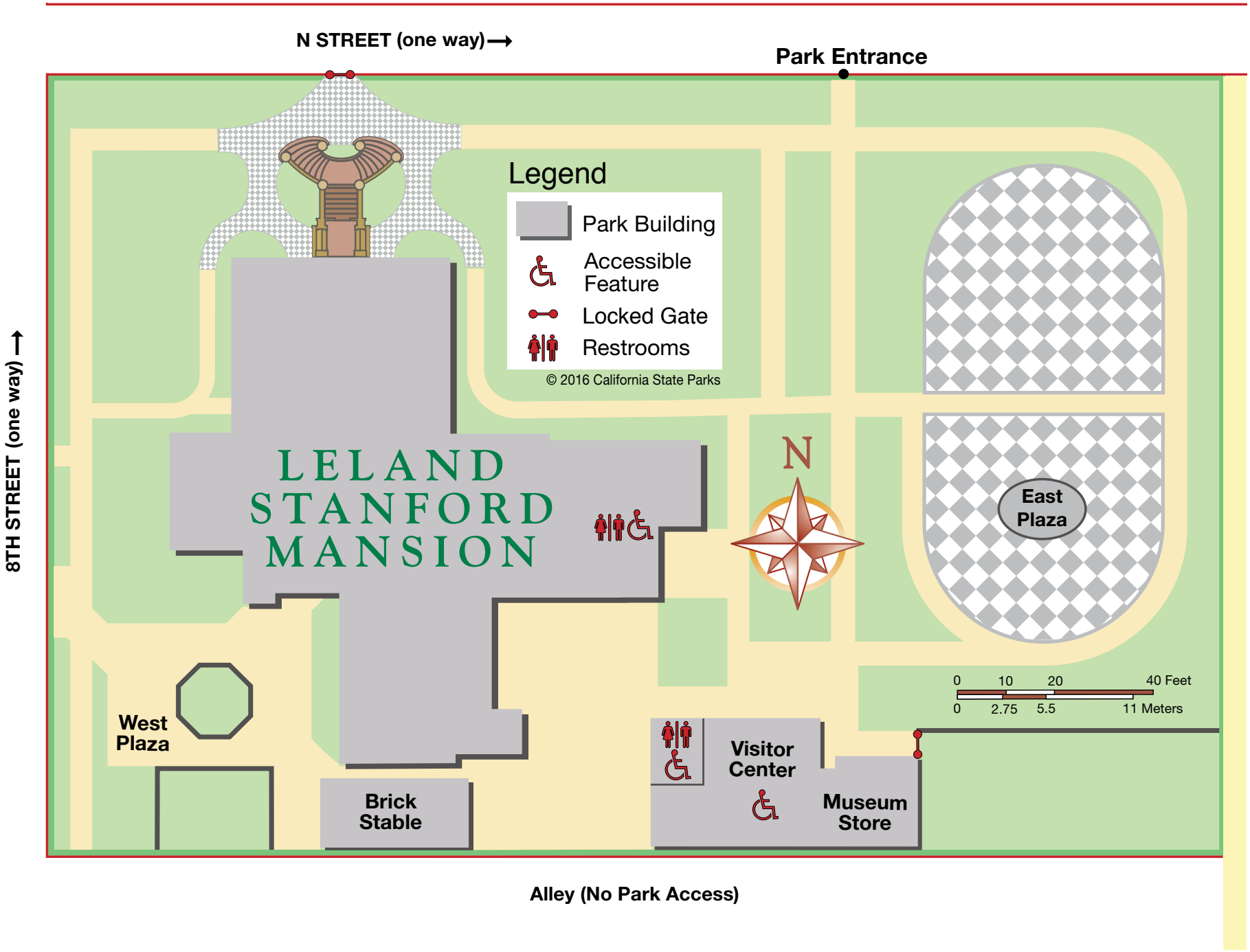
Today the Stanford Mansion is again ready to receive guests and to provide opportunities for visitors to learn about the home's fascinating past and exciting future.

TOURS AND ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

Mansion access is only by guided tour from the visitor center. Call (916) 324-0575 for tour hours. Elevator access, a travel wheelchair, and assistive listening systems are available. Interior openings to the 2nd and 3rd floors are 29.5 inches wide. Videos offer Spanish or English captions, and alternative format materials include a tactile model.

The Stanford-Lathrop Memorial Home for Friendless Children, c. 1925

This park receives support from the Leland Stanford Mansion Foundation, a nonprofit, public-benefit corporation.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