

Sources on Solano County history abound

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This is the second in a two-part series devoted to providing a list of history centers and historical sites in Solano County. These places offer a myriad of activities that enhance our regional heritage and teach people about the area's exciting past.

These also are resources for the genealogist and many offer tours and programs for groups and schools. Most of these organizations have a membership service and also welcome volunteers, offering a variety of ways in which people can participate and use their talents.

They are also always most appreciative to receive local artifacts and photographs and, of course, donations. Following is a listing of these centers, sites and resources.

Rio Vista Junction

The Western Railway Museum, located at historic Rio Vista Junction, features more than 100 pieces of vintage railway equipment, many of which are operated on a section of the old Sacramento Northern Railway.

Electric interurbans depart every hour carrying visitors on eight-mile round trips through the rural countryside to Gum Grove station. Pumpkin Patch trains are operated on this line in October, as are Santa's Electric Trains in December.

Diesel-powered trains run north from the museum every spring destined for Jepson Prairie, a federally designated national natural landmark.

There are spacious picnic grounds and self-guiding tours. A new visitors and archive center is set to open in 1999. The museum store carries one of California's largest selection of railroad-related books, magazines, videos and souvenir items.

Address: 5848 State Highway 12 (midway between Suisun City and Rio Vista). Open 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekends and Wednesday through Sunday in July and August. Admissions (including rides): \$6 for adults; \$5 for seniors 65 and older; \$3 for children 3 to 12; children under 3 are free. Phone: 374-2978. Web site: www.wrm.org

Rio Vista

The Rio Vista Museum is a “grandma’s attic” museum with display areas replicating life in and around Rio Vista from the mid-1840s and later.

The current exhibit is youth oriented and includes baby clothes from 1870s, an old crib, christening dresses and clothes, a high chair that served three generations of the same family dating to about 1885, and three dresses dating back to the mid-1870s donated by local residents.

A hands-on approach is encouraged with family scrapbooks and relics that can be personally examined.

Also on display is an excellent exhibit of farm equipment, tools and photos. There is an extensive exhibit of newspaper front pages from San Francisco, Sacramento, the delta and Solano County, with special concentration on World War II.

Vast research materials are available on the delta region, Bird's Landing and Montuzuma Hills, and on farming and sheep raising.

Membership fees from \$6 and up enable the member to a quarterly newsletter, first-choice tickets to the annual barbecue, and an invitation to the board of directors' annual potluck.

Address: 16 N. Front St., Rio Vista.

Museum hours: 1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

Admission: Free, but donations accepted. For private tours contact 374-5169 or 374-2321.

The Dutra Museum is a private collection on dredging, especially the clam shell dredge.

The collection is housed in a private 1900s house. Included are photographs, scale models of various dredges and an oral history of dredging given by Linda Dutra, a self-proclaimed “delta rat” whose family is involved in the dredging business. Shown by appointment to groups of 10 or more.

Contact 374-6339.

Benicia

The Benicia Historical Museum at the Camel Barn occupies the storehouse that was once used for the “camel corps,” 35 camels brought to Benicia in 1864 as part of a

failed experiment.

Exhibits highlight Benicia's history, including the former U.S. Army Arsenal. The museum shop sells an array of camels, local history books, stationery, commemorative coins and wine glasses and more.

The Capt. Charles P. Stone Hall can be rented for special functions.

Address: 2024 Camel Road, Benicia.

Open: 1 to 4 p.m. Wednesdays through Sundays.

Admission: \$2; senior citizens and youths age 12-18, \$1. Children under 12 free.

Contact: 745-5435.

Current exhibit: Revolving exhibit "Photos of early Benicia." Special arrangements made for those interested in research.

The Benicia Capitol State Historic Park features two buildings for viewing, the early state Capitol (1853-1854) and the Fischer-Hanlon House.

The brick Capitol building is in the Greek Revival style and is one of the state's finest vintage public buildings. The columns in the Senate were fashioned from Gold Rush-era sailing ships' masts and the original state seal.

The Fischer-Hanlon House was originally a hotel on another site. It was moved in 1856 and remodeled into a home for Joseph Fischer and his wife. It is completely furnished to that era. A Victorian Christmas is recreated each year for the public.

The Victorian garden connecting the two buildings features heirloom varieties of trees and flowers, including a wisteria plant more than 100 years old.

Address: 115 West G St., Benicia.

The Capitol is open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. The Fisher-Hanlon House is open on occasion.

Admission is \$3, children 6-12, \$2.

Contact: 745-3385.

The Benicia Fire Museum offers rare and vintage firefighting equipment and artifacts pertaining to fighting the “demon” in Benicia and Solano County.

Of special interest is an 1820s New York City fire truck shipped to Benicia in 1847. It was the first fire truck in California. It weighs 3 tons and 75 men were needed to operate it.

Two other fire trucks from the mid-1800s are featured. One is the second engine and was named after Chief Solano. It's known as Solano Engine No. 1. It was put in operation in 1855.

Address: 900 E. Second St., Benicia.

The museum is open noon to 4 p.m. the first and third Saturdays of the month, and by appointment.

Admission is free.

Contact: 745-1688.

The Benicia Historical Society holds meetings with guest speakers covering a variety of subjects connected to the history of Benicia, Solano County and the Bay Area.

Members of the society receive a newsletter listing events and programs. Self-guided walking tours available. Contact the society for free brochure. Biannual heritage house tour, with the next schedules for spring 2000. Contact: 745-1822.

Vallejo

The Vallejo Naval and Historical Museum has collections reflecting the history of Vallejo and the Mare Island Naval Shipyard.

The current exhibit “M is for Museum: Vallejo and Mare Island A to Z” is in celebration of the museum's 25th anniversary. The exhibit features an eclectic selection of items from the museum's permanent collection, including antique kitchen wares, Mare Island shipbuilder's tools, unusual textiles and children's toys.

The exhibit runs through Aug. 28.

The museum operates an extensive research and resource library. A full-service bookstore carries history books along with cookbooks, fiction and travel books. Also for sale are unique and unusual nautical souvenirs.

Memberships begin at \$25 and members receive free admission, discounts at the bookstore, a bimonthly newsletter and invitations to special events.

Address: 734 Marin St., Vallejo.

Hours: 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Tuesday to Saturday.

Admission: Adults, \$1.50; senior citizens and students, 75 cents. Children under 12, free.

Contact: 643-0077.

The Mare Island Historic Park Foundation is working on preserving the historic aspects of Mare Island.

Docent-led tours of Mare Island and the historic St. Peter's Chapel are available. The chapel, with its 16 Tiffany windows, is also available for weddings.

Contact: 557-0662 or 644-4746.

Suisun Valley

Martin-Suisun Historic Park is a memorial to pioneer Samuel Martin and the Suisunee Indian tribe that inhabited the Suisun and Green Valleys.

A video about the site and its history is available through Solano Community College media center and copies may be made upon request.

The site, located across from Solano Community College on Suisun Valley Road, includes evidence of 4,000 years of American Indian presence, notably a religious petroglyph and numerous bedrock mortars, and the Martin stone farmhouse built in 1861. It was renovated and enlarged by architect Julia Morgan in 1929. Group tours are available on request.

Contact: 864-1305.

The Vallejo Architectural Heritage Foundation is dedicated to the preservation, restoration and appreciation of Vallejo's historic homes and neighborhoods. Home tours are scheduled periodically.

An annual Christmas program, which occurs for one day a week or so before Christmas, features local choir groups accompanied by pipe organ and local artisans.

This takes place at St. Peter's Chapel on Mare Island. The chapel is famed for its stained glass Tiffany windows.

Contact: 644-7649

Online sources

The California Historical Society has a number of interesting links relating to California history. For information on Solano County historical agencies and musuems, go to www.calhist.org/Support-Info/CHAs.html#CHA-Solano.html

For information on publications on Solano County history:
www.calhist.org/Support-Info/Collections/Library-Misc/CACountyHistoriesGuide.html

Welcome To Solano County, Calif., is a genealogist's resource for Solano County archives and materials, and a good source for the generalist and researcher as well. Click on www.compuology.com/cagenweb/socomain.htm and www.compuology.com/cagenweb/solanlok.htm .

The Political Graveyard site is about Solano County's political history and cemeteries, and is found at www.potifos.com/tpg/geo/CA/SL.html . It includes the following: politicians who were born in Solano County, politicians who lived in Solano County, and cemeteries and memorial Sites in Solano County.

A major genealogy resource, including Solano County, is found at www.autumnstar.com/Genealogy/index.html

Downloaded from the Solano History Database

<http://www.solanohistory.org/698>

<http://articles.solanohistory.net/698/>