

# “Springtime at the Stone House” Gala

## John Marsh Historic Trust News Update

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## Gala Planned at the Marsh House

On April 14, 2007 from 2:00 pm to 6:00 pm, the John Marsh Historic Trust will hold an afternoon of “fun and frolic” under tents on the meadow beside the John Marsh House, Brentwood. Gates will open at 2:00 pm.

Dinner will be provided by the Monterey Bay Culinary Institute under the direction of celebrity chef, Rick Edge. Chef Edge joined the Institute following his success at the Highlands Inn, Carmel, and Pebble Beach restaurants. Wine tasting will be hosted by our local area vintners.

Also as part of the afternoon entertainment will be an auction and raffle.

Doug McConnell, well-known host of KRON-Channel 4 “Bay Area Back Roads” will be the Master of Ceremonies.

Tickets are \$75.00 per person and can be purchased by mail at P.O. Box 272, Concord CA 94522 or a Country Thyme Gifts, 219 Oak Street, Brentwood CA 94513. Tickets may also be purchased through PayPal at the John Marsh website with Visa, MasterCard or Discover cards. Only 280 can be accommodated.

The Gala is the kick off for a new, long-term fund raising effort. The JMHT is dedicated to restoring the magnificent Marsh House to its 1856 grandeur. The Trust is determined to raise the matching funds in 2007 necessary for winning grants to repair the south wall of the Marsh Stone House and other vital restorations.

The great Stone House is the crown jewel of the proposed John Marsh State Historic Park. This park, encompassing over 3,600 acres, will be the largest historic park in California.

Visitors must have a ticket to enter. Parking is limited and car pools are encouraged.



Volunteers cleaning the grounds around the south wall.

## 3rd Round Grant Application

The JMHT submitted to the California Cultural and Historic Endowment group a \$670,000 proposal to fund the restoration of the south wall which collapsed in 1977. As part of a successful grant application, the JMHT will have to provide \$167,000 in matching funds.

This is the third and last round of grants to be made from the bond money authorized by voter approved Prop 40. In the second round the John Marsh Historic Trust won a \$200,000 grant to prepare the architectural and engineering plans for restoring the Stone House. The grant required \$20,000 in matching funds.

If the Trust is successful in the third round, we will be on our way to preserving the Marsh House but it will seriously deplete the funds that the Friends have so far contributed .

March 1, 2007

William Mero, Editor

### Special points of interest:

- *Gala News*
- *Third Round of Grants*
- *Public Meeting/General Plan*
- *The Great Stone House*
- *Historical Snapshots*

## Public Planning Workshop #2

On March 20 in the Brentwood Community Center, 730 Third Street, the General Plan Project Team will present preliminary concepts for the John Marsh State Historic Park.

The input collected at this public workshop will be used to refine the draft General Plan and Environmental Impact Report (EIR).

The important subjects that will be discussed include the Marsh House, public use alternatives, local and regional trails, and operation and maintenance.

The California State Parks and the city of Brentwood needs your input—especially those of the Friends.

Please try to attend and participate in determining the development of California’s newest state park. The meeting will begin at 6:30 pm.

A big thank you to the **Fremont Bank Foundation** for the recent grant of \$10,000 to help restore the Stone House.

## The Great Stone House—An “Architectural Gem”

The great stone house built in 1856 by the pioneering Dr. John Marsh was placed on the "National Register of Historic Places" in the early 1977 and it was designated one of "Save America's Treasures" in 1998. Dr. Marsh only lived in the Stone House for less than three months before he was viciously murdered. The house became a monument to the end of an adventurous life and the dangers of the American frontier.

Architect Thomas Boyd, newly arrived in San Francisco, was hired to put a form to the plans developed by Marsh and his wife, Abby. The house is an architectural gem with the following features and characteristics. It is large and with good rectangular proportions at 36 ft. by 60 ft., by 40 ft. to the ridge of the roof. The interior walls of plastered brick stack straight up from the first through the third levels. This inherent geometry is largely responsible for the structural survival of the House through the one and one half centuries of neglect, misuse and earthquakes.

The roof at 45 degrees is very steep with four large dormers that create interesting full height useful areas on the third level. The roofing is hand split, tapered, redwood shakes in alternating rows of rounded "fish scale" shingles and square ended shingles. A large tower on the east side rises 47 feet, with rustic battlements at the top adding a unique drama to the form of the House. The crenellated top of the tower suggests the potential for defensive use. This is a reminder of the dangerous times that Marsh had endured. Adding further excitement and beauty is the ten foot wide piazza or verandah which circles three sides of the House. There is access from the interior to this

verandah from the first and second levels through full height French windows. The verandah provides welcome shade on the east, south and west as well as rain protection for outside activity. The aesthetics of these two elements is further enhanced by the views and oversight they would have provided to Marsh as he surveyed the activity of his vast rancho. Two small balconies at the third level on the east and west sides add to the balance of the House.

The exterior of buff colored sandstone, quarried on the rancho, adds to the architectural character. The stones are random, rubble like except at the corners, doors and windows. There they are rectangular and more finely tooled. The use of stone in the California of the mid 1800s was rare and signifies the wealth and importance of the owner (Kirker, *California's Architectural Frontier*, 1960). The arched top windows are slightly pointed on the third level only and both windows and doors have a prominent key stone. The thick exterior and interior walls of stone are separated by a four inch void and would have moderated the seasonal hot and cold temperatures of the area. The uneven firing of the brick, the moisture intrusion of the sandstone and the failure to tie these two materials together has made the House structurally vulnerable over time.

The House interiors are elegant in their simplicity. The wide stair hall extends from the front entrance to the matching rear entrance with arched topped sidelights. The parlor is a large room with a shallow arch of woodwork at the mid-

point. The arch does not divide the space but rather provides a sense of scale and articulation to the room. Two marbled mantled fire places provide further articulation to the large room of approximately 20 by 35 feet by almost 12 feet high. The French windows allow direct access outside to the verandah on three sides and create a inside-outside feeling to the room. The dining room, stair hall, kitchen and paneled "keeping room" complete the remainder of the first floor. The paneled wainscot of the office, probably not original, is in contrast to the unadorned simplicity of the remainder of the interiors. However, remnants of large plaster moldings or rosettes that were applied to first level ceilings have been recovered from the crawl space.

The second level is dominated by a suite of bedrooms separated by a large door and a pair of "his and her" closets. This bedroom suite is directly above the parlor and has the same amenities of fire places and access onto the top level of the verandah. Two other bedrooms, one perhaps a nursery with a large walk in closet, open onto the verandah at this level. The single bathroom of the House opens off the second level stair hall. The second level ceiling height is 10 feet as are the flat portions of the third level.

The third level has but three rooms. The graceful but low headroom stairway enters into a central space which leads to a ships ladder like access to the tower. This space has small balconies opening to the east and west. The tower is open air with a high crenellated parapet over which there is a 360 degree panoramic view from the delta waters to the foothills of Mt. Diablo. The tower was repaired after a major earthquake in 1868 and wood was shaped to simulate and replace the stone work.

This may be considered a reasonable way to rebuild the tower when the House is restored. Not only would this be in keeping with the historic repair of 1868, but the use of lighter weight wood, as compared to stone, would reduce the vulnerability of the tower in future earthquakes.

Gene Metz, President, JMHT



Marsh House today,



### Historical Snapshots-The Rescue of Gagnier's Scalp

In 1827 Colonel Snelling withdrew the military garrison from Ft. Crawford at Prairie Du Chien, Northwest Territories. Chief Red Bird of the Winnebagos seized the opportunity to raid Prairie Du Chien attacking the Gagnier family. Both the husband and baby

were scalped. By some miracle the baby survived becoming a local frontier legend. Red Bird was eventually captured and jailed for this crime.

Then John Marsh at great personal risk plunged into the winter wilderness alone and found the Indian village where Gagnier's dried scalp was decorating an Indian burial. He waited until night, entered the village and recovered Gagnier's scalp.