

Friends Update March 2006

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Brentwood Executes Grant Agreement

Bill Mero, Editor
March 2006

On December 13 the Brentwood City Council passed a resolution authorizing the city manager to execute the grant agreement between the City of Brentwood and the California Cultural and Historical Endowment (CCHE) for the Marsh Home Rehabilitation Project. In May 2005 the CCHE committee awarded funding for the John Marsh Rehabilitation Project in the first round of grant applications. These are funds derived from Proposition 40 monies that are to be used by public agencies and nonprofit organizations to preserve California's cultural and historic resources.

The CCHE approved a grant of \$819,839 to be matched by Brentwood and to be spent on the stabilization of the Stone House. In addition funds will also be used for completing the General Plan for the proposed John

Marsh/Pioneer State Park. Now that the city has finalized the grant agreement contractors can be hired. This can be a long process. Work on stabilizing the house will probably not begin until the Fall of 2006 or (more likely) the Spring of 2007.

Total money to be spent totals approximately \$2,300,000. Of this amount \$819,839 is the state grant. The rest of the money will come from developer fees paid to the City of Brentwood.

\$350,000 will be used to draw up the General Plan for the proposed state park.

One of the unsung heroes of this success story is Karen Wahl. She is Brentwood's full-time grant writer. Karen put together the successful Marsh grant request for the first round in three weeks. This was a job that a normal grant writer would need at least three months!



Second floor staircase



The south wall is next on the repair list once the foundations are secure.



Newly repaired west wall

Special points of interest:

- Grant Agreement
- JMHT Second Round Application
- History of the Marsh Adobe

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The Fight for the “John Marsh Parkway”

There has been an ongoing effort since 2003 by the John Marsh Historic Trust to name the nearly completed bypass that passes within a mile of the historic Marsh Stone House, the “John Marsh Parkway.” Board members Carol Jensen and Patty Bristow acting for the John Marsh Historic Trust have requested the State Route 4 Bypass Authority to approve the name change.

The segment of the road in question goes from Marsh Creek Road to Junction 160. Contra Costa Supervisor Mary Piepho has indicated her support for the new name. Bypass Director, Dale Dennis, is taking a cautious approach but has indicated a willingness to work with the JMHT to honor our famous California pioneer. The new bypass is scheduled to be turned over to Caltrans sometime in 2007-2008. If the new bypass has not been renamed by then, the Trust plans to ask Senator Torlaksen to pass legislation that would rename the bypass after John Marsh.



John Marsh should be remembered by the “John Marsh Parkway.”

JMHT Submits Second Round Grant Application

The John Marsh Historic Trust submitted a second round grant application to the CCHE. The application was for \$300,000 to be used for architectural engineering studies. The Trust, using money provided by the Friends, put up \$20,000 in matching funds for a total of \$320,000 if the new grant is successful. The JMHT felt this was a critical step for applying for restoration funds in the third round of grants which can be only be used for construction grants.

In the third round 45 million dollars will be available for distribution. If the City

of Brentwood is unwilling to match construction/restoration funding, we will have to find other matching fund sources.

Once we found out that Brentwood did not wish to participate in the second round, the Trust had only a couple of weeks to prepare a grant application. The Trust hired a professional grant writer, Betsy Van Patton, who worked closely with board members in order to meet the application deadline of January 31, 2006.

Some of the second round grant winners may be announced as early as July.



A gathering of the JMHT board in front of the Stone House. Mary Ann Hurley, State Parks Historian, is on the far right.

Public Park Hearings Scheduled for May

Once Brentwood accepted in December the first round grant from the CCHE and authorized matching funds, preparation for public hearings to establish a new state park began immediately. The large environmental firm, EDAW, is writing the General Plan.

Retired Mount Diablo Park Superintendent, Brian Hickey, has been hired as the overall supervisor of this project. Donna Plunkett is leading the EDAW General Plan planning team. The John Marsh Historic Trust has been asked to furnish historical data to aid in this effort.

As of this time, the first public hearings are set for May. There will be at least three hearings before the park commissioners. The first hearing is expected to be in Brentwood. The exact date is to be determined. We will notify the Friends promptly when we learn the exact date. We urge all of the Friends who are able, to attend the public hearings take this opportunity to participate in this extremely important process.

The JMHT board members plan to make presentations at the public hearing dealing urging that the proposed park and the Stone House reflect the Native Americans, pioneer women,

agricultural history, cattle industry, and medical practices of the time. We will urge the commission to make the restored Marsh House the center of educational activities concerning the history of early California.

The new park will include camping, hiking, biking, and horse back riding. This new park should enable the hardy hiker to travel from Brentwood to San Ramon entirely by wilderness trails. All outdoor, environmental, and historical organizations are being urged to participate in the public planning process.

Special House Tours Planned



Gene Metz, President JMHT, conducting tour.

Twenty five representatives of the East Bay Regional Parks visited the Stone House on February 22 on a tour lead by Craig Mattson, Superintendent of the Mount Diablo State Park District.

On May 13 a group from "Save Mount Diablo" will tour the property and eat a catered lunch at the house. Seth Adams and Craig Mattson will be the leaders.

The JMHT has arranged for the Friends of John Marsh to visit the Stone House on June 3rd. A nice lunch will be served at the house. The event is free but only a maximum of 50 guests can be safely accommodated. Please write or e-mail us ASAP if you want to reserve a tour spot.

This is just one small way we have of thanking the Friends for their continued support.

Significance of the Marsh Adobe

The John Marsh Adobe Eugene Metz A.I.A

The great stone house built in 1856 by the pioneering Dr. John Marsh is historically remarkable. Its unique architectural character represents one of the most dynamic periods in California history. It is important to put the significance of the House within the larger context of the man, the area and the time in which it was conceived and built. The House 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.

In 1836 Marsh was still in his mid thirties when, after investigating many tracts of land, he purchased a vast Mexican land grant, Rancho Los Meganos, for \$500. The bargain basement price reflected the physical dangers the new owner faced. The rancho's rolling grass lands studded with live oaks lay between the eastern slopes of Mt. Diablo and the Sacramento-San Joaquin delta. As the first Anglo settler in the Central Valley, he suddenly became the absolute ruler of a new, fifty thousand acre wilderness empire. This was the culmination of a lifetime spent exploring the North American frontier. Before the famous John Sutter, Marsh had moved into a hostile wilderness where no European had dared live before. He survived by using his medical and frontiersman skills together with an understanding of the culture and language of the Native Americans.

Marsh's education and writing abilities led him to document for restless Americans the rich agricultural potential of California and its benevolent climate. Although Marsh was the first through his letters to encourage American settlers to come to California, he opposed violence to end Mexican rule.

The Adobe

The original rancho adobe is gone now, melted by the winter rains. However no discussion of the great Stone House is complete without exploring the significance of John Marsh's earlier home, the old adobe. We know that the adobe was about 100 feet north of where the stone House is today, closer to Marsh Creek and generally facing the Stone House. For twenty years the humble adobe, built with the help of local Miwok Indians, was headquarters for the rancho. It served as a hospital for treating the sick and as a thick walled fort for fighting off Indian raiders, Mexican bandits and horse thieves. It was in the four room, dirt floored adobe that he and his second wife Abby raised their daughter, Alice. It was also the place of the near miraculous arrival of his long lost son, Charles.

The adobe is now recognized as the official end of the famous California Trail. The first organized migrant party to California arrived at the adobe in 1841. This group, the Bartleson-Bidwell party, was motivated and guided by Marsh's letters and articles extolling the agricultural richness and opportunities of California. The historical significance of Los Meganos and the adobe is further assured as this was the destination of famous explorers and pioneers such as Kit Carson, John Fremont, John Sutter and numerous other mountain men.

Most of all, it was where Marsh read his many books and wrote letters and news articles promoting the advantages of California. As a direct result of his letters, the Western Emigration Society was formed. His letters had an impact on an old friend and benefactor, Senator Lewis Cass, who influenced the expansionist policies of President Polk towards California.

The adobe contained four rooms and a loft. The thatched roof was extended and supported by two posts that provided a covered outside area and protection for the entrance. The floor was of dirt and windows and doors were crudely covered with hides. There was a fireplace which provided light for reading as well as warmth. It is thought that most cooking was done outside. One room contained shelves to accommodate Marsh's precious books. The loft frequently accommodated visitors, household servants, and workers, including those building the Stone House. Gun ports in the walls of the loft under the eaves were used to fight off attackers and thieves

Most of what is known about the adobe comes from the writings of visitors as well as letters written by Abby to her family. A small sketch placed on the survey map of Los Meganos in 1853 is a good indication of the exterior appearance as well as its proximity to the creek, gardens, vineyards, and orchards.



Marsh Adobe from the 1853 Whitcher Map. North is to the right.

Additional helpful information is provided by a uniquely detailed watercolor painting of the Stone House with wheat fields, corrals, and horse riding figures as well as Mt. Diablo in the background. This painting, thought to have been done in the early 1860s, shows the adobe's location relative to the

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Marsh Adobe Continued

Free Videos!

A DVD of Gene Metz touring the Stone House and describing the present condition of the historic structure from an architect's point of view along with a video showing the proposed park are free upon request. A dollar to cover the cost of shipping is the only charge requested.

We also hope that you will show or give this DVD of the Stone House and proposed park to any friends or organizations that might be interested in preserving California history.



Pure bronze, limited edition & numbered belt buckles became available recently. \$50 each. Send check to John Marsh Historic Trust, P.O. Box 272, Concord, CA 94522 Free Shipping

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House and Marsh creek. The adobe's outline in the painting is also consistent with the older surveyor's sketch. The adobe's location, general size and character are known and it must be rebuilt to provide an important historical complement to the Stone House and the proposed living history park.

(Next issue Gene Metz will finish with a fascinating discussion of the great Stone House)



This 1860s or early 1870s painting of Los Meganos Rancho is a valuable guide to the location of the Marsh Adobe and the restoration planning. In the background to the south are the twin peaks of Mt. Diablo. The Stone House is in the right center of the picture. The veranda can be seen along the front of the house.

The Marsh Adobe is the small structure at the Marsh Creek tree line behind and to the right of the Stone House. One can see the front porch on the Adobe as shown in the 1853 drawing. Marsh Creek is much more heavily wooded than today. The creek appears to have been dammed upstream of the house forming a large pond. An extensive vineyard is shown growing on the banks of the small lake.

Historical Snapshots—Marsh and Beckwourth



Famous Black Mountain Man, James Beckwourth

In 1845 Jim Beckwourth led a well armed group of 13 to 15 mountain men in support of the native Californios in their rebellion against Mexican governor Micheltorena and his infamous convict army. Micheltorena promised Sutter and Bidwell vast new land grants and titles as a reward for their military support against Castro and Alvarado, the rebel leaders. With his new found authority Sutter confiscated oxen, carts, medicine, and ammunition from Marsh and forced him to join his army as a lowly private under threat of imprisonment. Marsh's friend, Captain Weber and founder of Stockton, was already in chains for refusing Sutter's egomaniacal demands.

The two small armies met in the San Fernando Valley at the Battle of Cahuenga. Before any lives were lost, Marsh and his good friend, Captain Gantt, secretly met with Beckwourth and his men. They persuaded Beckwourth that Americans had no business fighting each other over a quarrel between Mexicans. Americans on both sides then laid down their arms. Without American support Sutter was soon captured and Micheltorena deported to Mexico.

Sutter and Bidwell never forgave Marsh for the loss of their promised riches. Bidwell took his literary revenge on a long dead Marsh 50 years later in a series of bitter memoirs. Beckwourth and five other Americans shortly after the "battle" stole 1800 horses from ranchos in Southern California and drove them to Colorado for sale at a handsome profit.