

WRITTEN TESTIMONY FOR THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA LITTLE HOOVER COMMISSION

by

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California State Parks

The California Department of Parks and Recreation is the State's foremost public agency for the collection, exhibition and interpretation of historical artifacts and archaeological specimens. The Department also has jurisdiction over more than 3,000 historic buildings and structures and 11,000 archaeological sites. Museum collections number approximately one million artifacts. About one half of these are on exhibit in 125 State Parks. The remainder are largely maintained in the State Museum Resource Center (SMRC), the collections of the Capital District and the California State Railroad Museum, all housed in a series of leased warehouses in West Sacramento and at McClellan Park in Sacramento. The Department's holdings of approximately two million archaeological specimens are stored largely in the State Archaeological Collections Research Facility (SACRF) in West Sacramento and in research facilities in Southern California.

The Department's artifact and archaeological collections are self-insured, that is we do not have policies covering them when they are in the Department's possession. However, if objects are loaned to private or non-state organizations, we do require the borrower to insure them until they are returned safely to the Department.

How did the Department of Parks and Recreation become the State's leading collector of artifacts, its "attic" some might say? The roots of the Department's collections go back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when private organizations such as the Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West began acquiring historic landmarks, including Sutter's Fort, and donating them to the State. Pioneer families and others then began donating heirlooms and other objects of historical interest to these sites. When the sites became part of the newly-created State Park System in the 1920s, the Department's artifact collection was born. As the Department expanded and acquired more historic properties, the artifacts they contained were merged into the collection. Since California, unlike most states, has not had a publicly supported historical agency, the Department has filled that role *de facto*, accepting into its collection artifacts donated by the public which elsewhere would have gone to a state historical society or museum. These acquisitions swelled the collection until the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, when it became clear that the Department had accepted too many artifacts that had no relevance to the State

Park System or its mission, and that it had neither the staff nor the space to care for such an expanding accumulation. As a result, the Department has tightened its acquisition criteria and initiated an active deaccession program to refine the collection. The archaeology collections, consisting of specimens found on State Park property, grew considerably from the 1960s through the 1980s, during which time the Department undertook large-scale excavations associated with the restoration of historic buildings and sites. As the restoration and excavation programs have slowed considerably over the past two decades, so has the growth of the archaeology collections.

Thanks to funding provided through the Rebuilding California State Parks Program portion of the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 84), the Department is currently rehabilitating a former U.S. Air Force facility at McClellan Park to house the collections stored in nine warehouses in West Sacramento. These warehouses have a number of defects which make them undesirable for the storage of historical and archaeological collections. Among these are:

- Location in the floodplain of the Sacramento River
- Leaky roofs
- Few environmental controls to ensure proper temperature and humidity for collections storage
- Obsolete wiring that no longer meets code and is a fire hazard
- Poor organization and inefficient operation since the warehouses were cobbled together over a few decades
- Expensive rents.

The McClellan facility will address each of these deficiencies, and will do so at considerable savings to the Department. These savings are the result of reduced utility charges, lower lease rates, and greater operating efficiencies, along with the cost avoidance for retrofitting the existing warehouses and adding more leased space to resolve fire and accessibility code violations. The McClellan facility also will have space sufficient to accommodate collections from parks that may be closing due to budget constraints, or that may need emergency relocation in the face of wildfires, floods or other natural disasters. In addition to the SMRC, Departmental Archives and SACRF, the Capital District and California State Railroad Museum collections and the Interpretation and Education Division's Departmental Photographic Archives will be located at McClellan. Other Departmental functions such as Fleet and Central Records also will move to the new facility. Opening of McClellan should occur in March or April 2013.

Deferred maintenance is endemic throughout the State Park System, impacting natural and recreational resources, as well as cultural resources. Its impact on cultural resources (historic

buildings, structures and landscapes, archaeological sites, artifacts, archives and Native American sacred sites) depends on the type of resource, the composition of the resource -- adobe, stone, wood, metal, paper, etc. Each will respond differently to prolonged lack of maintenance, care and upkeep. The environment in which the resource exists also has an influence on the impact of deferred maintenance. In a damp climate, wood that is neglected tends to break down and rot at a faster rate than in a dry climate. Likewise an adobe building, if it is not monitored and maintained, is at a higher risk of collapsing in a rainy location than in a more arid one. Deferred maintenance's greatest impact, however, is to the Department's inventory of unused or underused historic buildings. Because restoration is so costly, the Department has not been able to restore all, or even most of its historic buildings. The majority of the historic buildings are either abandoned or are being used for storage or some other low priority purpose. As such, they may not be adequately monitored and evidence of deterioration may or may not be detected. If a historic building is being used for purposes other than mere storage, however, they should be receiving some form of monitoring and maintenance.

The best way to revive the Department's deteriorated and unused historic buildings, therefore, is to use them, but not in the traditional Parks manner. For decades, the Department has carefully restored historic buildings to serve as traditional house museums – the “stand behind the velvet stanchions, please” brand of museums. This type of meticulous restoration, which the Department has done very well in the past, is both expensive, and, in today's society, increasingly irrelevant. Even Colonial Williamsburg, the flagship for historic restoration and the house museum experience in the United States, is having difficulty attracting visitors. Traditional historic house museums also tend to be revenue consumers rather than revenue generators – not even realizing a return sufficient to fund their maintenance and upkeep. Rehabilitating a building, however, and using it for any number of commercial and/or community based, as well as interpretive purposes, is generally less expensive than full restoration, and can result in the generation of revenue at least sufficient to pay for its maintenance. This does not mean non-historic commercialization of the Department's historic resources. The U.S. Secretary of the Interior provides standards and guidelines for the rehabilitation of historic properties, and the Department adheres, and will continue to adhere to them in all projects involving our cultural resources. There will always be a role for interpretation. But buildings were meant to be used, and used in many ways. In all instances such rehabilitation and adaptive reuse must be community based, with the community providing input as to possible sources of funding and desired uses for the historic property. Even if it achieves a stable income, the Department will not be able to afford the millions of dollars it will take to revive our historic resources. Repurposing and reusing these historic buildings and structures in partnership with commercial and community interests, therefore appears as the most likely and cost effective solution to the current deferred maintenance debacle.

History is more than just written texts. It is composed of the things people make, the buildings they build, and the stories that they tell. The Director of the British Museum recently wrote a history of the world based on 100 objects from his institution's collections. The same could probably be done for California using the Department's collections. This is because the objects tell stories of the past in ways that are immediate and understandable across cultures. Most of the history of human habitation in California is not the product of pencil or pen and paper. Rather, it is a story told through stone, basketry, beadwork woodcarving and oral tradition. Even among the early European and American settlers, many either could not or chose not to leave written records. Much of what we know of them also is drawn from the objects they made and used. The importance of these everyday items, which due to age and significance are now museum objects, to the history of California provides the impetus for the Department to maintain its museum, archival and archaeological collections.

The Department's collections also provide a vehicle for reaching many Californians who may not respond to traditional history. There is a popular myth that California's population is not interested in the history of their state or region. This idea is often trotted out to justify why a museum or historical society without a well thought out business and marketing plan or operating model cannot raise sufficient funds to stay in business. But scratch the surface and you will find that people are, or can be, interested in times gone by. What stimulates their interest, however, are not thick tomes, but rather the real things of history. This is illustrated by the popularity of television programs such as *Antiques Roadshow* or *Pawn Stars*. Audiences watch these shows not just to find out the monetary value of what might be in grandma's attic, but to learn the stories behind the objects. The objects in the Department's museum, archival and archaeological collections do have a high intrinsic value through the connection with our shared past they provide. It is a value that cannot, and should not, be monetized, and whose importance as source material for the study of the human experience transcends the boundaries and storage drawers of California State Parks.

The collections of the Department of Parks and Recreation have both national and international significance and reputation. Scholars come to Sacramento from across the nation and Europe to make use of the outstanding Native American basketry collection. The nineteenth and twentieth century paintings by California artists in the Boggs Collection at Shasta State Historic Park are consulted by art historians. Old master paintings and rare *objets d'art* from Hearst San Simeon State Historic Monument are loaned to museums across the globe for special exhibitions. Graduate students, professors, scientists and other researchers make frequent use of both the prehistoric and historic specimens in the archaeology collection, and historians pore over the Department's historic photographs of the Angel Island Immigration Station. These are aspects of the Department's operation that go largely unknown, but which embody its mission and vision.

The current fiscal crisis facing the Department, along with the deliberate and steady decline in General Fund support for California State Parks over the past decades has led to the proposed closing of 70 State Parks in Fiscal Year 2012/2013. The Department has delegated to the Districts much of the responsibility for closing these parks, or for finding partners or donors that will help keep them open. From the outset of this process, it has been made clear that the Department will retain oversight and responsibility for the resources, natural and cultural, in parks that are either closed or transferred to partners for operation. The Archaeology, History & Museums Division at Headquarters has been tasked with providing assistance to the Districts in the closure process through inventorying collections, advising on issues relating to packing, moving and storing artifacts, as well as the protection of historic buildings and archaeological sites through mothballing and monitoring.

It is hoped that most, if not all of the parks containing significant museum collections and historic and prehistoric sites will remain open through donor agreements that allow the Department to continue to operate the parks, concessions, and operating agreements with partners. If a park cannot be saved from closure, however, arrangements will be made to ensure that the historic buildings, sites and landscapes collections are protected and collections preserved. Our preference would be to keep the collections on site during the closure period, but only if adequate security and environmental conditions can be guaranteed. Not only does this save the expense of packing and moving, but it eases concerns that collections taken to Sacramento will never come back. It also will facilitate reopening of the park and avoid the cost of shipping artifacts back to the park. If the collections cannot be kept at the park, the next recommendation is that they be stored offsite, but in the general vicinity of the park. An example of such an arrangement would be the air conditioned and heated storage containers that Monterey District uses to store artifacts in the District corporation yard. Once again, security of the collection and proper environmental conditions remain paramount. If this level of storage cannot be accommodated in the vicinity of the closed park, it may be necessary to transfer the collection to Sacramento. This, however, is the strategy of last resort, and, since collections in each park are unique the cost of the transfer will vary, depending on the volume, condition and composition of each collection. The Districts will not be charged for storage of artifacts in Sacramento and the transferred objects will be returned to the parks as soon as they either find partners and re-open, or the closure period ends and the Department re-opens the parks.

The cost of closing a park consists of a number of components, just one of which is management of the collections it might contain. Other issues such as monitoring, law enforcement, and natural resource and vegetation management also enter into the closure equation. It would be inaccurate, therefore, to consider inventorying, packing and transporting the collections as causing the closure of a park to be more expensive than keeping it open. In

addition, packing and storage of artifacts is a one-time cost which may add to the closure expenses in the first year, but will have fewer fiscal impacts in subsequent years until the park is re-opened.

Other states also have been facing fiscal crises relating to their parks and historic sites. However, their challenge is not as great because their systems are smaller, and the economic difficulties facing their administrations are less traumatic. In general, states considering closing museums and historic sites favor the approach of leaving the buildings and collections intact, instituting security measures and keeping the power and HVAC operating. This is the strategy being considered by the Louisiana State Museum System, with the state hiring janitors to provide basic custodial care for the objects in the closed museums or historic homes, and laying off administrators, curators and other specialized staff.

While the Department of Parks and Recreation preserves and interprets many sites of significance to the history of California, almost all of these reflect the period of pre-European Contact, the Spanish, Mexican and Russian experiences, and the Anglo-American seizure and settlement of California from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the early-20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The coverage of the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century is much less comprehensive. A few parks near the coast do contain remains of coastal defense emplacements from World War II. Angel Island State Park has considerable remnants from World War II, as well as a Nike missile launch site from the Cold War era. The Cold War also is represented at Point Sur State Historic Park. While the principal feature of this park is the 19<sup>th</sup> century light station, the property also contains buildings from the former U.S. Navy's Point Sur Naval Facility (NAVFAC) which tracked Soviet submarines during the Cold War. These buildings, however, are closed and the grounds are not accessible to the public at this time.

The Department has identified other sites that could be used to interpret the history of California during this latter period. These, along with suggestions for acquisition of other culturally significant properties are discussed in the *California History Plan: Telling the Stories of Californians*, located on the Department's website by clicking "Archaeology and Museums" under the "Park Management" tab. Other potential sites have been examined by the Department's planners, including the NASA rocket test facility at Santa Susana, the World War II Japanese internment camp at Tule Lake, and the United Farmworkers Delano headquarters at 40 Acres. In the case of Tule Lake and 40 Acres, given the current financial crisis, the Department could not afford to acquire, staff and interpret these locations. Fortunately, the Federal Government has assumed responsibility for their preservation. The Department regards this as a good thing, since these historically valuable sites will be preserved. The Department still maintains an interest in the Santa Susana site, although it continues to require extensive toxic cleanup and remediation before acquisition could even be considered.

For some time the Archaeology, History & Museums Division has been examining possible models for the preservation and promotion of the Department's historic buildings and structures. The repurposing and adaptive reuse of these resources (discussed earlier in this testimony) is a promising tool. Adaptive reuse can enable a historic site to cover the costs of its maintenance and upkeep, and could raise additional income for the preservation of other cultural resources as well. To this end, this spring, the Department launched an initiative to develop a pilot program for the adaptive reuse of a limited number of historic buildings. If it is successful, it could lead to a wider project to rehabilitate and repurpose more of our cultural sites.

A variation on the adaptive reuse idea also has been discussed. It is currently in use by state parks and historical agencies in Maryland, Delaware, Connecticut, Massachusetts and North Carolina and is called a "Resident Curator" program. This program invites private individuals to rehabilitate abandoned and dilapidated historic homes and other buildings on park or agency property in return for a long-term lease that basically provides for lifetime residency. In addition to rehabilitating and maintaining the buildings to the U.S. Secretary of the Interior's standards, resident curators have to provide a minimum level of public access to the site, and allow regular inspection by historic preservation personnel, restoration architects and specialists. Although California State Parks certainly has a sufficient number of empty and underused historic buildings to initiate a resident curator program, whether this could be done within existing laws and regulations would need to be determined as would the Department's commitment to such an unconventional approach to historic preservation.