

ALLENSWORTH
(Allensworth Historic District)
(Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park)
Beside California Highway 43 in southwestern Tulare County
Allensworth
Tulare County
California

HALS CA-68
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

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- Location:** The former town of Allensworth and its surrounding areas, beside California Highway 43, in southwestern Tulare County, California.
Latitude: 35.863575, Longitude: -119.388078 (Google Earth, Simple Cylindrical Projection, WGS84).
- Significance:** Allen Allensworth (1842-1914) was a significant person in the African-American community when he retired from military service with the highest rank of any African-American officer in the U.S. Army in 1906. When he co-founded the California Colony and Home Promoting Association in 1908 and its associated town of Allensworth, it was a significant event in social history. It was a community founded, built, and governed by African-Americans, for African-Americans, so that they could live free from the racial discrimination that still existed more than forty years after the end of the Civil War.
- Description:** Allensworth Historic District (National Register #72000263) contains thirty-seven contributing buildings on 600 acres in the San Joaquin Valley. Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park (SHP) is a 240 acre public park containing what remains of the original townsite of Allensworth and an adjacent agricultural buffer. The park contains twenty-one historic buildings and three historic building sites. Buildings in the park have been, or are planned to be, restored or reconstructed to a 1908-1918 period of significance. The landscape is an agrarian one characterized by its flatness, lack of adornment, and scarcity of trees. Streets are on a north-south and east-west grid, except where the grid is intersected at a diagonal by railroad tracks and State Highway 43.
- History:** Allen Allensworth (1842-1914) was born a slave in Kentucky in 1842. He was punished as a child for learning to read and write. He escaped slavery by joining the Union army as a nurse in 1862, followed by service in the U.S. Navy as a seaman from 1863 to 1865. From 1865 to 1886, he supported himself as a restaurateur, cook, servant, janitor, schoolteacher, school administrator, Baptist minister, and lecturer in Kentucky, and in other states from Kansas to New England. From ca. 1868 to ca. 1878, he also attended the American Missionary Society's Normal School in Louisville, Kentucky, the Baptist Theological Institute at Nashville, Tennessee, and the National School of Elocution and Oratory in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He was an elector-at-large during the 1880 Kentucky Republican Convention, and he represented Kentucky at the 1884 Republican National Convention.
- When Allensworth learned in 1882 that the all-African-American regiments in the U.S. Army lacked African-American chaplains, he lobbied to be appointed

Chaplain. Henry Plummer was appointed the first African-American Army Chaplain in 1884 and Allensworth the second in 1886. Allensworth was appointed with the rank of Captain. From 1886 to 1906, Allensworth served as Chaplain of the 24th Infantry in Oklahoma, New Mexico, Utah, the Philippines (during the Spanish-American War), California, and Montana. At most posts, he was the Superintendent of the Post School. At some posts, he was also the Post Exchange Officer, Post Treasurer, and/or Post Librarian. He was promoted to Major in 1904 and to Lieutenant Colonel upon his retirement from the military in 1906. Allensworth's promotion made him the highest-ranked of the eight African-American commissioned officers in the Army at that time. The *Washington Post* reported that Allensworth was probably the most renowned of all the African-American chaplains.

Allensworth retired to Los Angeles, California, and traveled to lecture on African-American self-sufficiency. In October 1907, newspapers published a call by Allensworth to establish an all-African-American town. In August 1908, Allensworth and four other men¹ co-founded the California Colony and Home Promoting Association in rural Tulare County, with Allensworth as President. The land that they purchased included an existing railway stop named Solita. They placed the town center of the colony at the railway stop, and named the town Allensworth. To the north of the town, they reserved land for a future African-American vocational school, which they hoped would become the Tuskegee Institute of the West.

African-American families came from all over the country to build this new community with Allen Allensworth. The colony flourished in the early years, supported by railway business and farming. By 1914, the colony had its own library, school house, post office, voting precinct, and judicial district. In September 1914, Allen Allensworth was hit by a motorcycle while crossing the street in Monrovia, California on his way to a lecture, and died the next day. Without their leader, the colony was unable to surmount a number of obstacles.

Neighboring farmers raised funds to build a railroad spur line that diverted the railway business to Alpaugh. Groundwater – the colony's only source of water – had begun to recede and become saline before Allensworth's death, and the colonists were unable to obtain a new source of water. The State Legislature voted against the proposed vocational school, eliminating another possible source of income. The economic downturn that started in 1918 after World War I hastened the colony's decline.

Ed Pope attended elementary school in Allensworth while his family lived in Allensworth's former home from 1938 to 1940. While working as a draftsman for the California State Parks department in 1969, he noticed that there were no state parks in California dedicated to the history of African-

¹ The other co-founders were William Payne (schoolteacher underemployed as a janitor in Los Angeles), William Peck (American Methodist Episcopal Church minister), J.W. Palmer (Nevada miner), and Harvey Mitchel (Los Angeles realtor).

Americans in California. He successfully lobbied state park officials and state legislators to consider the feasibility of a State Historic Park at Allensworth, and helped to shepherd the project through the community review process. Allensworth Historic District was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1972. Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park opened in October 1976.

Sources:

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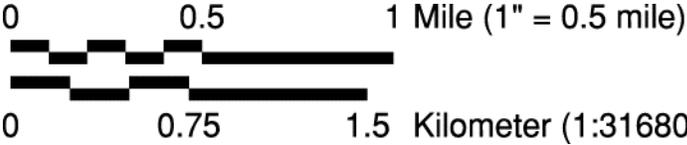
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Historian: Cate Bainton
HALS Northern California Chapter
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Approximate Historic and Existing Boundaries



- LEGEND**
- 1908 California Colony and Home Promoting Association
 - 1908 Allensworth townsite
 - 1976 Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park
 - 2009 Restored, reconstructed, or preserved townsite
- Park support areas**
- 1 Visitor center
 - 2 Campground
 - 3 Agricultural demonstration area
 - 4 Service area
 - 5 Sewage pond
 - 6 Agricultural buffer



(Photographer: United States Department of Agriculture, National Agriculture Imagery Program, "North East Quarter, Allensworth Quadrangle," 2009. Delineator: Cate Bainton, 2011.)