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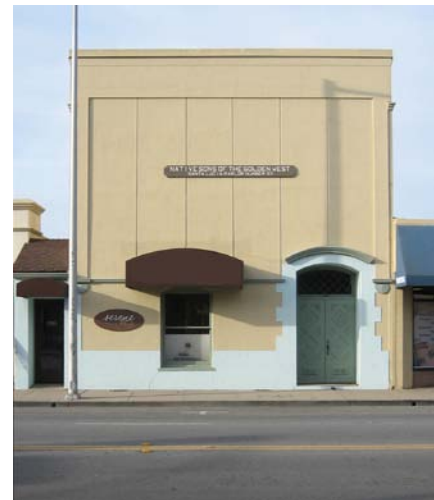
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What in the World is a “Native Son of the Golden West?”

Gold and “newcomers” both have played a big part in the history of the state of California and both of them played a big role in the formation of the Native Sons of the Golden West.

The California Gold Rush was one of the unmatched marvels of American history. In 1848, California was a tranquil wilderness where the population density was so low that, on average, only one human being dwelt per each 528 square miles. But after President James K. Polk made the official announcement on Dec. 5, 1848 that gold had been discovered, things ramped up very quickly. Gold seekers (mostly young men) came in droves from all corners of the earth. Within a short time, 100,000 people were living in California. They were industrious, civic-minded people. They held a Constitutional Convention, and activated a state government on Dec. 20, 1849. They acted so rapidly that it took Congress almost a year to catch up with them because California was not officially declared a state until Sept. 9, 1850. It was an unparalleled phenomenon; no other American state has been organized in such “can-do” circumstances.

But by the mid-1870s, many more new residents were flooding into California. They were Civil War veterans seeking grants of public lands, and were people who could enjoy the convenient transportation of the newly completed transcontinental railroad. Old-timers shook their heads and worried that, with the nature of the population changing so rapidly, the colorful history of the Gold Rush and early-day statehood soon would be forgotten and neglected. So they hit upon an idea: Why not form an organization of men who had been BORN in California whose mission it would be to preserve the state’s history? And that’s exactly what happened, causing the Native Sons of the Golden West to be formed on Sept. 11, 1875.



What do Native Sons of the Golden West do?

Long before there were such things as state historical parks and the like, in the 1880s Native Sons kicked off fund-raising campaigns to save the disintegrating buildings that were icons of

early California history – Sutter’s Fort (the refuge for early pioneers), the Franciscan Missions (anchors of Spanish settlement in the 1700s) the Monterey Custom House (the oldest government building in California). We Native Sons also began placing historical markers and partnered with the state to encourage it to do the same (most notably starting with the monument at the gold discovery site at Coloma). Today, we still place markers, sponsor history essay contents for schoolchildren, offer scholarships, co-sponsor conferences and lectures and work with other historical organizations.

We also get involved in non-history related civic activities and charities. And we have our social side too. In this day and age, when it gets tiresome staring into the screen of a TV or computer monitor, we offer an alternative: The chance to look into real human faces at a multitude of dinners, family picnics, barbecues and other just-plain-fun events.

Who are Native Sons?

From its beginnings, the Native Sons has been more progressive in receiving into its membership people who typically were shut out of other organizations. For example, the Native Sons never denied membership to applicants on religious grounds. Likewise, even its earliest membership rolls are dotted with Hispanic surnames. Nevertheless, as was normative for many of its counterpart organizations in times gone by, for a number of decades, the Native Sons was heavily dominated by a tone of Anglo-Saxon Americanism that included some exclusionary membership policies. As time has progressed, those policies have long since been succeeded by forward-looking, all-embracing ones. So today, the Native Sons membership encompasses people from all ethnic segments that characterize the richly diverse general population of California.

And, although we still revere our name of Native Sons, over the years, many women, looking beyond the paradox of nomenclature, have joined our ranks.

What the Heck is a “Parlor?”

As you read about Native Sons, you may encounter – and be puzzled by – the term “parlor.” We call our chapters “parlors.” Why do we do that? There are two theories. First theory: In olden days, there were few public meeting halls; so chapters met in members’ parlors. Second theory: We did it just to be different.

Want to be a Native Son?

If you were born in California, you are invited to join the Native Sons of the Golden West. For information, contact our Grand Secretary at 800-337-1875.

