

## Historical Resources

Some or all of the following are available at Meriam Library, CSU Chico; Chico Branch, Butte County Library; Chico Museum; Barnes & Noble Booksellers; Made in Chico.

▶ “Ripples Along Chico Creek: Perspectives on People and Time”  
By National League of American Pen Women, Butte County Branch

▶ “Annie K. Bidwell: An Intimate History”  
By Lois McDonald

▶ “John Bidwell and California: The Life and Writings of a Pioneer, 1841-1900”  
By Michael Gillis and Michael Magliari

▶ “Exploring Chico’s Past...and Other Essays”  
By Michele Shover

▶ “John Bidwell: The Adventurous Life of a California Pioneer”  
By Nancy Leek

▶ “History of Butte County”  
By Mansfield

▶ “History of Butte County”  
By Wells and Chambers

▶ “My Hometown Chico” and “My Hometown Chico, Another Look”  
By Marcia Myers Wilhite



*This brochure was created by the Chico Heritage Association and Chico Chamber of Commerce.*

For additional information on Chico, give us a call,  
stop by our office or visit our website at  
[www.chicochamber.com](http://www.chicochamber.com)



**Chico Chamber of Commerce  
Visitor Center**

180 E. 4th Street, Suite 120  
P.O. Box 3300  
Chico, CA 95927

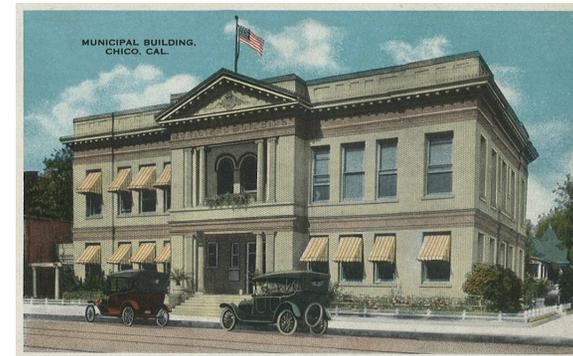
(530) 891-5556  
(800) 852-8570

*Supported in part by funding from  
the City of Chico*

Updated  
07/2019



## Local History



*Built 1911*

## A Brief Overview

Chico is rich in Native American and Gold Rush history. Earliest inhabitants of the area were the Mechoopda Indians, primarily hunters and gatherers. The first recorded Europeans traveled through the Northern Sacramento Valley in 1828.

John Bidwell, who arrived here in the Central Valley in 1841, was a member of the first wagon train to set out for California. In 1848, he was among several miners who discovered gold on the Feather River. With his earnings, he bought land on both sides of Chico Creek, built an adobe residence, a general store and began farming on his Rancho del Arroyo Chico.

The origins of the City of Chico can be traced to two 1844 Mexican land grants made by the governor, Micheltorena: the Farewell Grant to the west, and the Rancho del Arroyo Chico Grant of 22,000 acres which Bidwell purchased.

In 1860 he hired a surveyor to lay out the town of Chico, across the creek from his residence. To encourage settlers he donated land for public buildings, parks and entire blocks for churches; only one church still occupies its original site - the Catholic Church. Some of his farm employees were encouraged to move off his farm and build a house in "town."

While a Congressman in Washington, D.C. he met and fell in love with Annie Ellicott Kennedy, well-educated daughter of a prominent family. They were married in 1868.

Construction on Bidwell's Mansion began in 1865 and completed in 1868. He dedicated it to Annie.

John Bidwell, active in both agriculture and politics, helped transform the Sacramento Valley into a rich farming area. Annie worked on behalf of Native American education, women's suffrage, and the temperance movement. She encouraged the Maidu to attend the chapel she had built and ministered to them. Both John and Annie were instrumental in establishing the local Presbyterian Church.

Bidwell's home was a prominent center of social and political life in the upper Sacramento Valley. They entertained frequently: community and church members, leaders and committee workers of the WCTU, family members, other distinguished travelers and guests like John Muir, Sir Joseph Hooker, Frances Willard, President Hayes, and General Sherman.

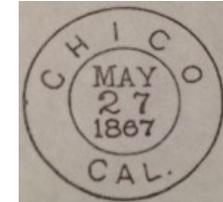
In 1887, when citizens campaigned to locate a new state teachers' college here, Bidwell sweetened the deal by offering to donate eight acres of his cherry orchard on the south side of the Big Chico creek.

John Bidwell died in 1900. In 1905, Annie Bidwell made the first of several donations to the city that created Bidwell Park.

From a small farm community of fewer than 500 in 1860, to today's population of over 90,000, Chico has grown due primarily to five things: Bidwell's farsightedness; the arrival in 1870 of the California & Oregon Railroad; the opening, in 1889, of the Chico Normal School (now California State University, Chico); the Diamond Match Company, a major corporate logging firm that established its western headquarters here in 1904; and the Chico Municipal Airport which housed the Army Air Base during WW II.

## Fast Facts

- ▶ While working for Sutter In 1845, John Bidwell filed a map of the Rancho del Arroyo Chico with the Mexican government.
- ▶ In 1851 an official United States Post Office called Chico was established at Bidwell's Rancho Chico.



- ▶ 1861: John Bidwell's General Store was located on the corner of First Street and Broadway- now home to a restaurant named Tres Hombres.
- ▶ Bidwell introduced hundreds of varieties of plants and trees from around the world at Rancho Chico and later, in 1888, the Forestry Substation in lower Bidwell Park, known today as Cedar Grove.
- ▶ 1937: Bidwell Park doubled for Sherwood Forest in some scenes of the original Warner Brothers film, *The Adventures of Robin Hood*. At other times, parts of *Gone With the Wind*, *Friendly Persuasion*, and *Red Badge of Courage* were filmed in the Chico area.
- ▶ John Bidwell ran for President of the United States in 1892 on the Prohibition Party ticket. He polled 264,133 votes, the most ever for a Prohibition Party nominee.