

Jack London State Historic Park harvests 6,000 pounds of fruit and a year's worth of gratitude

In this season of thankfulness, there's a lot of gratitude coming out of Jack London State Historic Park in Glen Ellen, most of it grown in the historic orchard that the park and its supporters have been restoring since 2017.

"In 2021, volunteers from throughout the community gleaned – or harvested - 2,500 pounds of fruit. In 2022, we were able to increase the total to 3,600 pounds. And in 2023, we gleaned an amazing 6,000 pounds of produce, including approximately 900 pounds of plums and 5,000 pounds of pears," said Deputy Director and Director of Operations Eric Metz.

Since 2021, almost all of the produce from the orchard has been donated to [Farm to Pantry](#), a non-profit organization that supports environmental sustainability by rescuing locally grown food and sharing it with those experiencing food insecurity in Sonoma County.

"The gleans at Jack London State Historic Park are among my favorites of the year. As you stand under a tree that looks weary with age, you are instilled with reverence when you discover the tree can still provide buckets of good food despite its age, feeding people from its branches, decade after decade," said Farm to Pantry Executive Director Duskie Estes. "I am so grateful for the bounty of these trees, which Farm to Pantry shares with over 100 community partners, including Burbank Housing, La Luz, Lideres Campesinas, Comida Para Todos, Redwood Empire Food Bank and more," she added.

The orchard and the park have received major support, in both volunteer labor and monetary contributions, from Sonoma Valley Rotary Club (Sonoma Valley, Glen Ellen, Valley of the Moon/Oakmont and Sonoma Sunrise) and Sonoma District 5130, which includes the 52 Clubs north of the Golden Gate. Taken together, Rotary provided over 850 volunteer hours in 2022 and 2023. They also provided funds for purchasing new peach trees and materials and other expenses associated with the project.

"Rotary's commitment has been transformative for the orchard and created a community connection point in the park. We are so grateful for their generosity and friendship," said Matt Leffert, executive director of Jack London State Historic Park.

In August of 2023, Charmian's Circle spent a day working in the orchard. The philanthropic group was created in 2016 to honor Charmian London's legacy at Jack London State Historic Park and highlight her life and contributions before, during and after her life with husband Jack London. Their first fundraising effort funded the renovation of the second floor of the House of Happy Walls Museum. Today, they honor Charmian's legacy by expanding and enhancing the programs for the children of Sonoma Valley and beyond – teaching them about her, the park, and the beauty that nature provides.

"When the youth of our county learn all that the park has to offer – including this historic orchard - another generation will be inspired to preserve and support it. We're grateful for the opportunity to help extend Jack and Charmian's legacy and support our Sonoma neighbors," said Charmian's Circle Co-Chair Laura Stanfield, who coordinated the work party.

“This year has had its challenges but the support of organizations like Rotary and Charmian’s Circle have been crucial to continuing the legacy of sustainability and community that Jack London envisioned during his lifetime,” Leffert said. “All of us at the park are sincerely grateful for their contributions, both physical and financial.”

ORCHARD HISTORY

In 2002 Jack London State Historic Park acquired approximately 600 acres of land from the Sonoma Developmental Center State Hospital. This land included an historic orchard - 110 acres of apple, pear, apricot, peach, cherry, and plum trees that were planted primarily in 1908-1912. By the 1980s, the orchard had been abandoned.

In 2007, California Department of Parks and Recreation and the National Park Service partnered on an assessment of the orchard and determined it to be a valuable Historic and Cultural Landscape and that it should be stabilized for future generations to experience.

Soon after that, Jack London Park Partners entered into an operating agreement with the Department of Parks and Recreation to manage Jack London State Historic Park and the non-profit began working in this historic orchard to stabilize the historic trees. This work consisted of clearing competing vegetation away, pruning deadwood, bracing, thinning fruit, mulching, watering and removal of harmful invasive species, and this work continues today.

While doing this work it became apparent that an expanded project was needed as many of these historic trees had already been lost, and even the healthy trees are nearing the end of their life cycle. Jack London Park Partners developed a plan with California State Parks for a cultural restoration of the historic orchard, which began in 2017.

This new expanded plan includes replanting areas of the historic orchard grid with cuttings taken from the historic trees. These cuttings (scions) are grafted onto rootstock by a grafting expert. When ready, they are planted on the same grid where historic trees have disappeared. By doing this, visitors to the orchard will not only get to see and appreciate the individual trees, some of which are over 100 years old, but will also be able to experience what a pre-World War II orchard landscape would have been like.

In the fall of 2017, Jack London Park Partners planted the first tree in the orchard in over 50 years—a quince seedling grown from a cutting taken from the last surviving quince tree in the historic orchard. To date more than 50 trees have been planted including quince, apple, pear, cherry, and apricots.

Peaches were an important part of the orchard in its heyday, but the trees were lost to time. In the early 1950s more than 40,000 gallons of fruit was being canned per year from the orchards and much of this would have been peaches.

In March of 2023, 18 volunteers, including 13 from the Sonoma Valley Rotary Club, descended upon the historic orchard at Jack London State Historic Park for a workday, planting 18 peach trees. Restoring the peach grove adds to the historic accuracy of the groves which were originally planted a hundred years ago.

To date, approximately 35 acres of the orchards have been restored.

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About Jack London State Historic Park

Jack London State Historic Park, in the heart of the Sonoma Valley, is operated and funded by Jack London Park Partners, one of the first non-profit organizations to be entrusted with management of a state park on behalf of the people of California. Funding to keep the park going strong is generated from visitors, members, and generous donors. Learn more about the park at <https://jacklondonpark.com/> and on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#).

[Laurie Armstrong Gossy](#)
larmstronggossy@gmail.com
415-290-6830