

J.B. and Martha Ford had six children, five of whom were born in this house (Susan Fidelia was born in San Francisco). Their last child, Persis Amanda, lived only eighteen months. During their time here, the Fords made instrumental contributions to Mendocino's first church, school, and bank, as well as the wagon road to Ukiah.



The Fords. Back row, left to right: Jerome Chester (b. 1856), Catherine Pauline (b. 1857), Charles Denslow (b. 1858). Front row, left to right: Martha Hayes Ford, Ella Jane (b. 1860), Jerome Ford, Susan Fidelia (b. 1864).

Not pictured: Persis Amanda (1866–1867).

The Fords lived in this house until 1872 when J.B. moved his family to Oakland to provide better educational opportunities for his children. Their eldest son, Jerome Chester, returned to Mendocino just two years later to become, at age 18, the youngest superintendent of the mill. He lived in his family home until the early 1900s when the mill was sold.

Jerome Bursley Ford died in Oakland October, 1889, and Martha Hayes Ford died five months later in April, 1890. Their remains were buried in Mendocino, their first and fondest home.

In May of 1993, Jerome Bursley Ford was recognized by the California State Legislature as the founder of Mendocino.

In the late 1960s, resident artist Emmy Lou Packard led a successful grassroots effort to save the Mendocino Headlands from development. Mendocino Headlands State Park, which included the Ford House, was acquired by the California State Department of Parks and Recreation in 1972. After restoration and reconstruction, the Ford House opened as a State Park Visitor Center in August of 1983.

In 1986, operation of the Ford House was turned over to the Mendocino Area Parks Association (MendoParks). Docent and volunteer programs enable the Ford House to stay open daily, year-round. Gift shop sales, donations and fundraising allow the operation of the Ford House without the necessity for state funding.

The Ford House is more than a historic home. It is a visitor center as well as an interpretive center for the beautiful and unique natural environment of the area and its local state parks. Permanent exhibits like the 4x8 foot diorama of Mendocino as it looked in 1890, and seasonal exhibits inform residents, school groups and visitors of the natural and cultural history of the Mendocino area.

*“Appreciation through Education
Leads to Preservation”*



FORD HOUSE

MENDOCINO HEADLANDS STATE PARK VISITOR CENTER

Operated by
MendoParks



**45035 Main Street
Mendocino, California
(707) 937-5397 | MendoParks.org**

MendoParks is the 501c3 nonprofit organization that supports State Parks in Mendocino County

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When news of the sinking of a ship (the Frolic) loaded with valuables from China reached San Francisco lumberman Henry Meiggs, he sent his employee, Jerome Bursley Ford, north to see if there was anything of value to salvage. J.B. Ford did not find the ship, but he did recognize the value in the vast forest of huge trees (redwoods or *Sequoia sempervirens*) that stretched for miles in a seemingly endless supply of potential wealth.

The year was 1851. The demand for lumber in San Francisco was growing faster than supply, due to the influx of people seeking their fortunes in the gold fields and in all the business ventures that supported the miners.

On J.B. Ford's recommendation, Meiggs arranged for sawmill equipment to be shipped around the Horn from the East Coast. The sawmill machinery and the men to work it were dispatched from San Francisco on the brig Ontario, captained by David F. Lansing. Meanwhile, Ford returned north overland to locate a site for the new mill.

The first mill was built on the headlands that would later become Mendocino. Later, a second mill was built at the mouth of Big River and the first abandoned. After Meiggs suffered some severe financial difficulties (and absconded on a ship bound for South America in the dark of night), the mill was closed and reorganized. The new mill owners were J.B. Ford, E.C. Williams, A. Godeffroy, W. Sillem and Henry Bowie. It took them many years to pay off Meiggs' debts.

In 1854, before J.B. Ford sailed to Connecticut to marry Martha Hayes, he arranged with E.C. Williams to have a house built during his absence. It was the second house built with



James B. Ford



Martha Hayes Ford

lumber from the mill in Mendocino. He returned to Mendocino with his twenty-three-year-old bride on July 4, 1854.

Martha was, apparently, in for a surprise or two! First, there were only two other settler women in the rough new town and, second, E.C. Williams had placed the kitchen and dining room in the basement. Although the main house was bright and cheerful with its many large windows and magnificent views of the ocean, its basement kitchen, with only half-sashed windows, had to be lit by candles both day and night. As might be expected, J.B. Ford had a kitchen/dining room wing added to the east side of the house a few years later.

Over time, the Fords surrounded the house with beautiful gardens featuring a large variety of plants which were considered "rare and choice," including a hothouse grapevine considered to be "the largest in the county."



The Ford House circa 1863