"You can tell a great deal about a people, a nation, by what it chooses to remember, what graces the walls of its museums, and who it memorializes in its monuments. Yet, one can tell even more by what is forgotten. Often it is the essence of the African American experience that is forgotten or underplayed. America cannot understand its own history unless the African American experience is embraced as a central factor in shaping who we are and what we have become as Americans."

Lonne Bunch, Founding Director
The National Museum of African American History and Culture
The Smithsonian Institution

We Are Not Strangers Here highlights the untold stories of African American pioneers, miners, farmers, entrepreneurs, and civic leaders from as far north as Shasta County, throughout the Central Valley, and as far south as the Imperial Valley. The exhibition, podcast, and education program challenge widely held stereotypes and provide a more complete understanding of the diverse experiences of those who came before us.

The Society of California Pioneers has partnered with Elixir to present the Bay Area premiere of We Are Not Strangers Here. A concurrent exhibition of family photographs from the African American Museum and Library at Oakland, archives on loan from the San Joaquin County Historical Society and Museum, and images of rural life during the early years of statehood courtesy of the California State Parks provide additional context.

The support of our members enables us to offer free museum admission to all and museum education programming at no cost to schools or parents. Additional funding was provided by California Humanities and the National Endowment for the Humanities as part of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, the California Small Business COVID-19 Relief Grant Program, and the Henry Mayo Newhall Foundation.

Founded by individuals arriving in California before 1860 and thriving under the leadership of several generations of their direct descendants, The Society of California Pioneers opened one of the first Libraries in California, as well as a grand hall for public exhibitions and private social events. Today, we operate a research library and a museum, both housed in one of the iconic Montgomery Barracks Buildings on The Presidio of San Francisco.

Alvin Coffey, who was formerly enslaved, won an early member of The Society of California Pioneers. His story, a repatriation of this portrait, and Coffey’s illuminated documents are featured in We Are Not Strangers Here.