

Modesto California

Away from the frenetic pace of cities such as Los Angeles, Modesto California has developed as a bedroom community in recent years. The town started life as an Old West town with something of a wild reputation! Today, the local authorities are keen to extend the hand of friendship to the world and there are sister city liaisons with the Ukraine, Mexico, India, Canada and Japan.

One of the most well known landmarks in the town is the McHenry Mansion. Robert McHenry, a local ranch owner and banker, built the house by hand at the beginning of the 1880s. The building was restored to its original condition and opened to the public. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Admission is free and there are guided tours around the property.

Opposite the mansion, the McHenry Museum and Historical Society acts as an archive for the history of Modesto California and the surrounding area. There is a changing exhibition space, where past displays have included a silver collection, dolls and quilts. The permanent exhibition contains a series of rooms to show life in the time of the pioneers and beyond. There is a general store, a dentist's office and a hardware store. There is also a replica of a blacksmith's forge and artifacts associated with gold mining. An exhibition of oil paintings shows images from a typical cattle ranch in the Old West. The museum organizes special events and there is a well stocked gift store.

The town has a famous son in film director, George Lucas. His breakthrough film, American Graffiti, was inspired by his time at the local High School. The film shows real life characters and actual events that occurred in Modesto California, although the actual filming took place in Petaluma. The George Lucas Plaza was named in his honor and an impressive bronze statue was installed to pay tribute to Lucas. The statue takes a scene from the film and shows a teenage couple sat on the hood of a 1957 Chevrolet.

In June 2007, students and staff from the Modesto Junior College, where Lucas had been a student, organized a celebration to mark the 30th Anniversary of his most famous movie, Star Wars. Everyone was invited to turn up, dressed as a Star Wars character and the Film Television Department hosted talks and seminars on the work of Lucas. There was also a Star Wars trivia contest and an exhibition of memorabilia from the film. The film was screened along with THX 1138, a movie that Lucas began whilst still a student in Modesto California.