

**PRIMARY  
SOURCE**

# GOLD! GOLD! GOLD!

## CHAPTER 12

*As you read the following accounts of the gold rush, look for ways in which the discovery of gold changed the character of the people in California.*

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The discovery of these vast deposits of gold has entirely changed the character of Upper California. Its people, before engaged in cultivating their small patches of ground, and guarding their herds of cattle and horses, have all gone to the mines, or on their way thither. Labourers of every trade have left their workbenches, and tradesmen their shops. Sailors desert their ships as fast as they arrive on the coast, and several vessels have gone to sea with hardly enough hands to spread a sail. Two or three are now at anchor in San Francisco, with no crew on board. Many desertions, too, have taken place from the garrisons within the influence of these mines: twenty-six soldiers have deserted from the post of Sonoma, twenty-four from that of San Francisco, and twenty-four from Monterey.

Major Edwin Mason, Report of 1848, in Fremont's *Geographical Memoir Upon Upper California* (1849)

It may be interesting to give here a few instances of the enormous and unnatural value put upon property at the time of my arrival. The Parker House rented for \$110,000 yearly, at least \$60,000 of which was paid by gamblers, who held nearly all the second story. Adjoining it on the right was a canvas-tent fifteen by twenty-five feet, called "Eldorado," and occupied likewise by gamblers, which brought \$40,000. On the opposite corner of the plaza, a building called the "Miner's Bank," used by Wright & Co., brokers, about half the size of a fire-engine house in New York, was held at a rent of \$75,000. A mercantile house paid \$40,000 rent for a one-story building of twenty feet front; the United States Hotel, \$36,000; the Post Office, \$7,000, and so on to the end of the chapter. A friend of mine, who wished to find a place for a

law-office, was shown a cellar in the earth, about twelve feet square and six deep, which he could have at \$250 a month. One of the common soldiers at the battle of San Pasquale was reputed to be among the millionaires of the place, with an income of \$50,000 *monthly*.

Bayard Taylor, *New York Tribune* correspondent, in *Eldorado, or Adventures in the Path of Empire* (1850)

We went into San Francisco shortly before the rainy season—about three months after I had first seen it. Already it was changed out of recognition by the crowds of people added, and the buildings which had grown up. Houses were rapidly going up for winter; night and day and Sunday, the sounds of hammers never ceased. Ready-made houses were to be had, and some very pretty little ones from China. One of these was bought and put up for me on a lot we had in what was then called Happy Valley.

Jessie Benton Fremont in *A Year of American Travel* (1877)

I have been at work all the past week, and still am \$8 in debt for boarding. I dug 50 cent worth on Monday, \$1.00 Tuesday, Wednesday \$1.70. Thursday \$2.00, Friday \$2.00 and Saturday \$6.00. Bought a spade on Tuesday for \$4.00. Paid \$10 last night in gold dust in account of my week's board. Am not discouraged yet, but find it very hard work for a little filthy lucre. Am anxious to get enough to take me to San Francisco to get letters from home and answer them. Hope to go in one week more.

Bernard J. Reid, gold miner, diary entry of September 30, 1850, in *Overland to California with the Pioneer Line*

The California gold rush did not make many of the "forty-niners" rich. This satirical cartoon was published in 1853 in *Pen Knife Sketches* by A. Delano. In the cartoon, the "used up man" sings his song of woe to the tune of the popular song "Oh, Susannah."

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