



TRAILBLAZERS OF AMERICA

PragerU



JOHN SUTTER



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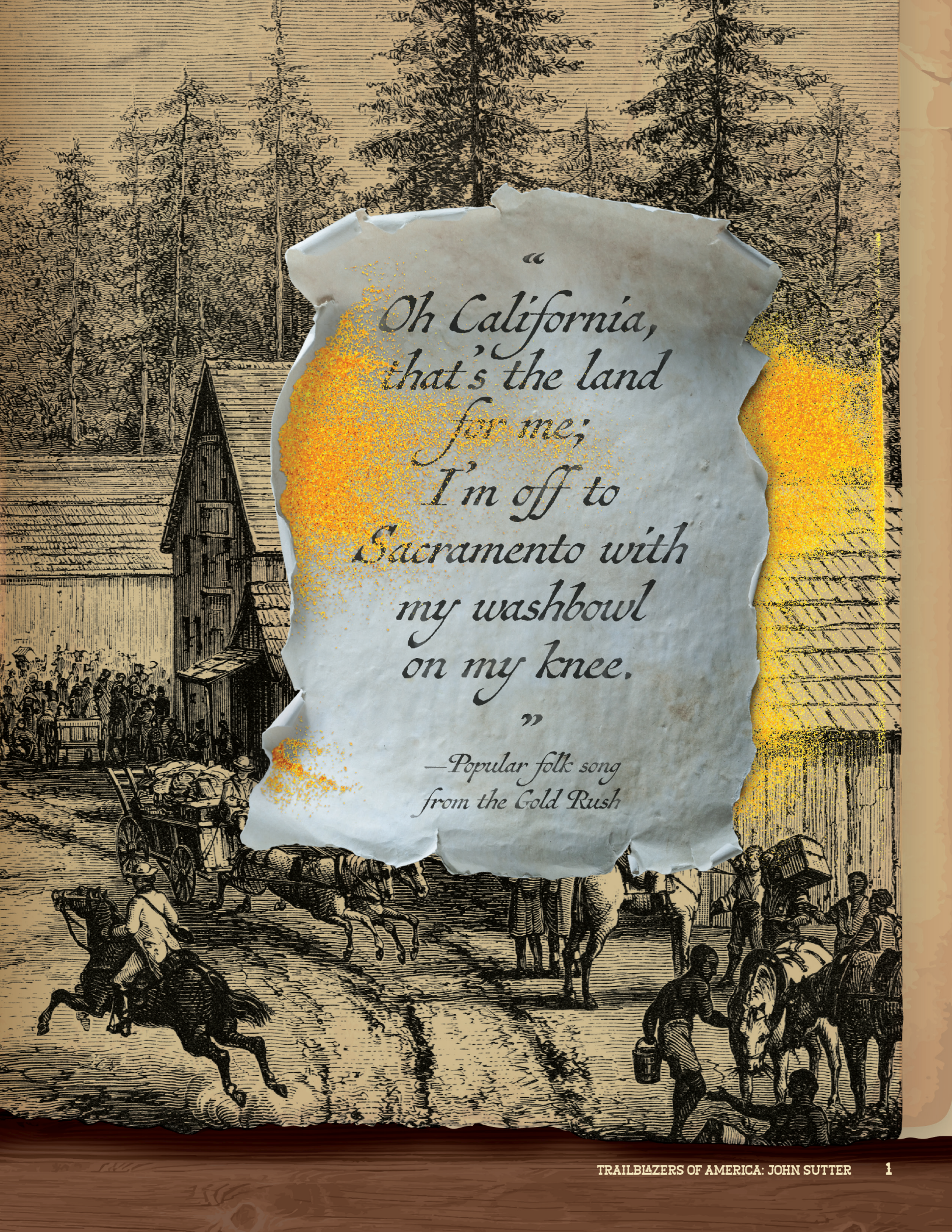
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JOHN SUTTER





“
Oh California,
that's the land
for me;
I'm off to
Sacramento with
my washbowl
on my knee.
”

—Popular folk song
from the Gold Rush

Paradise

Alta California Territory, Mexico (modern-day Sacramento), 1839

Just before the **launch boat** reached the river's edge, the man from Switzerland with the curled mustache jumped into the water and scurried to shore. *Why is he so excited,* thought the Mexican guide, *this **gringo** has no idea what he's getting into.*

The two men made their way to high ground in order to get a clear view of the surrounding area. Out in front of them, another blue-green river curved through the land and joined the one they had been traveling on for days. The European, who insisted on being called "Captain Sutter," exclaimed, "This is the perfect spot. Right here, where the rivers meet, is the place to build."

With the mighty Sierra Nevada off in the distance, the guide had to admit that the land Sutter envisioned for his fort was beautiful—but it was also dangerous. This land was lawless, and droughts, fires, and floods were only some of the risks. The guide couldn't help but chuckle.

"You disagree?" questioned the captain.

The guide replied, "I'm sorry, sir, but this part of **Alta California** is wild land. We're too far inland for the Mexican authorities to protect you, and if Indians or bandits don't get you, nature will. I really think you should settle near the coast..."

The guide kept going with his reasoning, but Sutter's mind drifted to his family thousands of miles away back in Europe. *I don't care what he thinks. This is the perfect place to build a future for Anna and the children.*

Sutter thanked the guide for his input but told him his mind was made up. "I know it's going to be tough, but I didn't leave Europe for an easy road. Along with the fort, we'll build a tannery, a blacksmith's shop, a grist mill—everything pioneers need. People will come."

"If you say so," remarked the guide with a sigh.



Sutter looked out over the massive river valley and imagined fields with rows of growing fruits and vegetables. *People will come, he thought. It will be paradise, and my family will watch it flourish from our front porch.*

"You'll see," Sutter explained out into the distance. "What matters is that this place doesn't care where people are from, only what they can do and what they can become."

John Sutter: Titan of Tenacity

John Sutter never shied away from a challenge. His life was filled with obstacles and even plenty of failures, but he never gave up trying to make the most of it. Along the way, he became California's most famous pioneer. When Sutter arrived, California (or Alta California as it was then known) was not yet a part of the United States. It was the northernmost territory controlled by Mexico, but only a few places near the Pacific Ocean coastline were actually inhabited by Mexicans. Inland, there were a small number of Native Americans, but mostly, it was an untamed ferocious wilderness.

In hopes of beginning the process of taming California, the Mexican government agreed to allow Sutter to settle about 50,000 acres of his choosing and make it his home. After an extensive search, the pioneer from Europe picked the land surrounding the **confluence** of what would later be named the Sacramento and American Rivers, and it was a wise decision. The spot sits between the San Francisco Bay and the Sierra Nevada, and the fort and mill he built there made him a key player in California's early history.

Sutter's vision of a farming colony called "New Switzerland" (or, as the **Californios** called it, *Nueva Helvetia*) did not fully materialize, but his presence and hospitality shaped the state we know today. From his attempt to help the starving **Donner Party** to the fort's role in the **Bear Flag Revolt** that launched California to statehood, the Swiss visionary was present at historic moments again and again. The famous **California Gold Rush** even began at Sutter's **sawmill** on the American River.



In fact, it was the Gold Rush that ultimately ended Sutter's California adventure, but the forward-looking immigrant never gave up. With a larger-than-life appetite to build his dreams, Sutter moved from one opportunity to another with **tenacity**. More importantly, his risky, ambitious trailblazing paved the way for others. For pioneers on the West Coast, his fort was a friendly and welcoming haven—a place for rest, supplies, news, and shelter.

Thanks to Sutter's hustle and hospitality, the state of California would become one large welcome mat for risk-takers. Millions like him would one day travel to a new, untested place filled with opportunity.

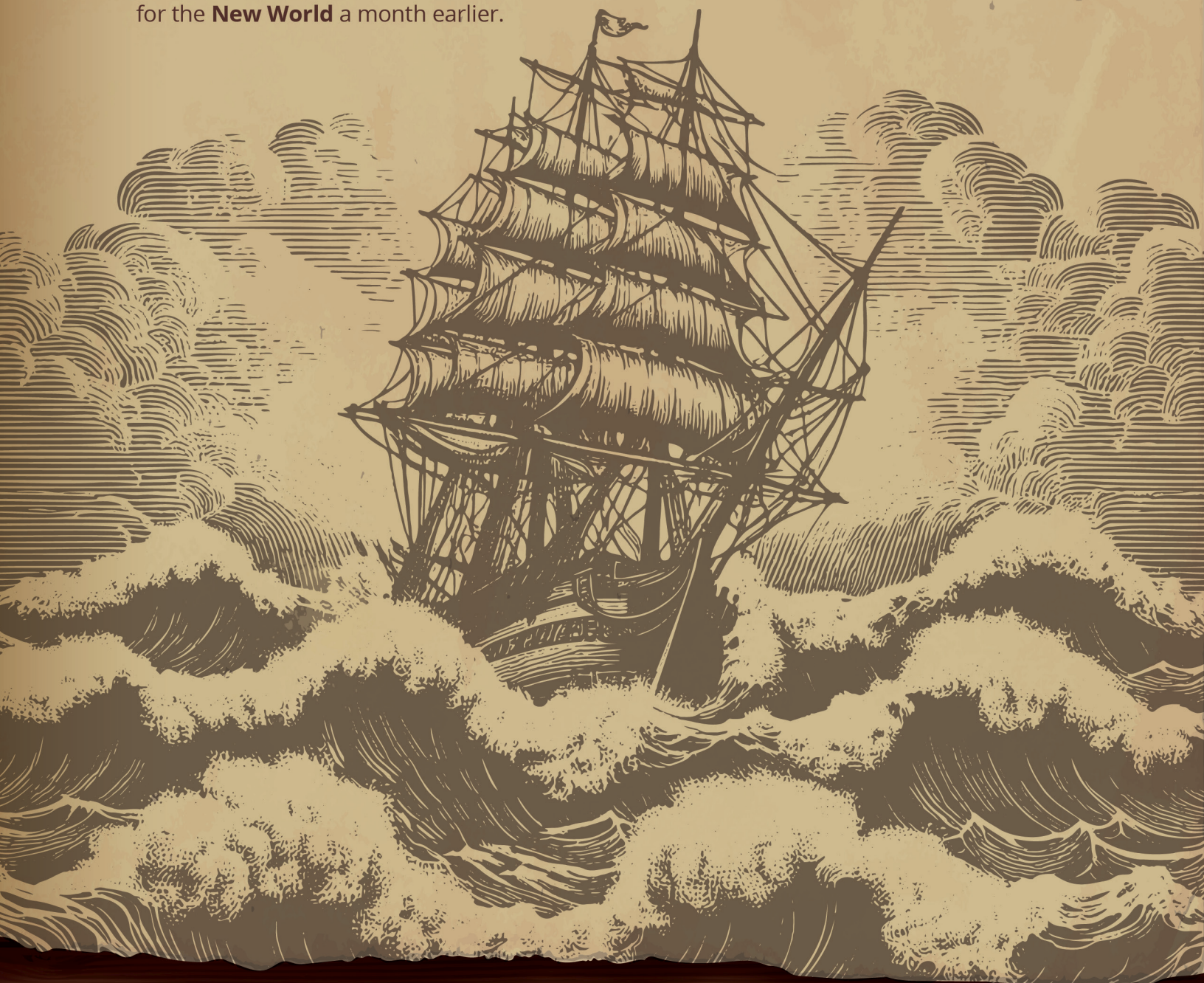
On the Move

John Sutter believed he was born for greatness. The man who would attempt to build his own colony in California was born in 1803 in the small town of Kandern, Germany. His name at birth was Johann August Suter, and like countless immigrants, he changed it later to sound more American.

While Sutter's parents were not rich, they made sure their son was educated. He was eloquent, well-read, and itching with ambition. When he finished school, Sutter moved to the neighboring country of Switzerland, where he apprenticed for a bookseller in the city of Basel. In the nearby town of Aarberg, he met a girl named Anna and began **courting** her. Before long, the two were married and raising five children.

With a little money in his pocket, Sutter started a **haberdashery**—a store that sold men's clothing and other dry goods—but thanks to a shady business partner (along with Sutter's own reckless spending), the store collapsed under debt. It also didn't help that Switzerland had business laws penalizing Sutter for being a German-born foreigner, and these types of restrictions made the freedoms of America attractive to him.

Having failed at his first business attempt, Sutter joined the Swiss military in 1828 and rose to the rank of under-lieutenant. This gave him the basis for a flashy new identity—in America, he would start introducing himself as “Captain Sutter of the Swiss Guard” to impress people. In the meantime, military service did not solve his money problems. In June of 1834, Sutter’s **creditors** issued a warrant for his arrest... but Sutter was long gone. With his wife Anna’s help, he had already fled Switzerland and sailed out of France for the **New World** a month earlier.



New World

For most people, failure can be devastating, but Sutter's failure in Switzerland gave him a driving motivation to succeed in the New World.

Sutter arrived in New York City in July of 1834, and like many others, his path did not lead directly to California. Traveling with other European immigrants, he made his way to Indiana, Missouri, and as far south as New Mexico. Ever the businessman, Sutter traded mules for a profit, and he even tried running a hotel. With so many European immigrants moving west, his fluency in French and German proved advantageous, but times were tough. When times were really tough, "Captain Sutter" hustled and found jobs working as a clerk to survive.

Despite his hard work, none of his efforts were profitable, and Sutter decided it was time to risk it all and venture into the unknown. The Captain packed what belongings he had and began a long and uncertain journey to a place called Alta California.

At that time, California was a lawless, undeveloped Mexican territory. To help tame the rough country with limitless potential, government authorities were offering land to anyone daring enough to settle there. To a foreigner like Sutter, struggling to make a name for himself, the offer sounded perfect.

Heading to California?

It was not an easy trip!

In the 1830s, there were no roads, and the Transcontinental Railroad, connecting the West Coast to the rest of the country, would not be completed until 1869. A direct path to California included enormous mountain ranges and a desert stretching across modern-day Nevada and Utah called the **Great Basin**. These natural barriers forced travelers to either try their luck on a northern route, in covered wagons along the **Oregon Trail**, or a southern one, taking an even longer boat trip around South America.

However, despite the incredible efforts it took to get there, the allure of California proved irresistible... who could resist a place with gorgeous, plentiful land, mild weather, and gold nuggets waiting to be scooped up?

"I was surprised when I found a total absence of all government in California, and even its forms and ceremonies thrown aside."

—U.S. Navy Lieutenant Wilkes, 1841



AMERICA

IN THE TIME OF

JOHN SUTTER



HEAD OUT WEST!

TRAVEL CHOICES

1839

*If you were heading to California
in the mid-1800s, you could:*

1

Leave from Boston and sail around two continents.

On a budget? Not a fan of fresh fruits and vegetables? Take the scenic ocean voyage of your dreams! On a **schooner** crammed with cargo and other adventurers, you'll sail down the Atlantic seaboard, pass through the shimmering Caribbean, and head for **Cape Horn**, the bottom tip of South America.

Once you're there, watch out for storms, jagged rocks, and blustery winds... and if you make it around the cape, you're halfway there!

Great option for world travelers... but remember, it could take up to eight months.

GET TO T

THE GOLD RUSH



2

Leave from New York and cross Panama.

Not interested in seeing South America? Cut eight thousand miles off your trip by stopping at the exotic Panama **isthmus**! Once you're there, it's sixty miles of river, swamp, and thick, noisy jungle to the Pacific Ocean. If the mosquitos and malaria bother you, just remember that you're toughening up for California's bears!

Once you've crossed over to the Pacific side of Panama, don't forget the rest of the trip. With any luck, another boat will arrive to take you up the coast.

One month total... assuming you make it out of the jungle.

3

Leave from Missouri and take the California-Oregon Trail.

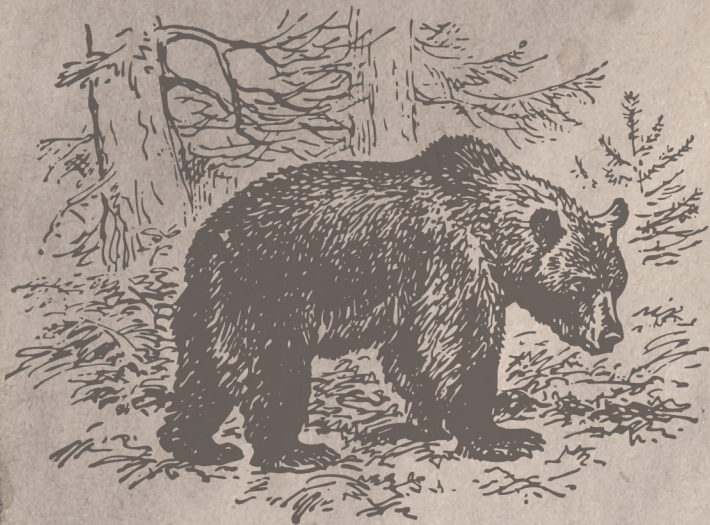
Nothing like six months in a bumpy wooden wagon to test your endurance... but once you arrive in pristine Oregon or California, you'll have done it! Slow and steady wins this 2,000-mile race.

Reaching the West Coast by land means plenty of adventure. Between storms, prairie fires, slithering rattlesnakes, Indian attacks, diseases like cholera, and treacherous river crossings, there's plenty of thrills for the whole family! Grouping up with other wagon trains and hiring a guide is a must. Stock up on supplies before you leave Forth Worth, Texas or Independence, Missouri.

Still not sure?

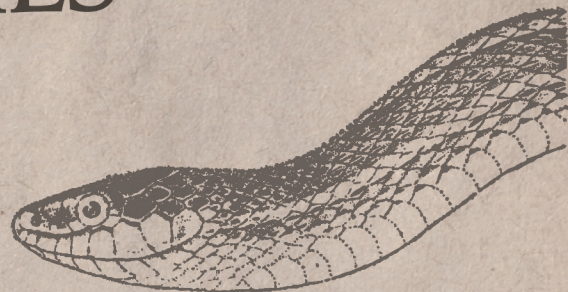
*6,000 wagons and 40,000 yearly passengers
can't be wrong!*

A FIELD GUIDE TO
**THE WEST COAST & SIERRAS
ANIMALS**



CALIFORNIA GRIZZLY BEAR

A fierce, intimidating brown bear that once lived in the mountains of Northern California. The "Bear Flag Republic" was named after it, and the grizzly stands proudly on California's flag today. Sadly, the last California Grizzly may have been spotted in 1924.



GARTER SNAKE

A colorful snake found in freshwater habitats along the San Francisco peninsula. Also called the "San Francisco Garter," these snakes grow 40 or 45 inches long. They stand out for their greenish-blue belly and red, white, and black stripes.



KIT FOX
FRONT PAW

KIT FOX
HIND PAW



KIT FOX

A small fox native to California's plains, hills, and Central Valley. This skinny mammal has wide ears, small foot pads, and a bushy tail.

SEA LION
PERCHED ON ROCK



SEA LION

A smart, playful seal native to the West Coast. Known for their loud barks and acrobatics, sea lions are favorites at aquariums and marine shows. In the wild, they gather on docks and jetties, creating noisy "haul-outs" that have become iconic sights along California's coast.

A FIELD GUIDE TO
**THE WEST COAST & SIERRAS
PLANTS**



COFFEEBERRY

A dry, evergreen shrub that gets its name from clusters of dark, reddish-brown berries. Careful... they might look like coffee beans, but they do not taste like them.



SITKA SPRUCE

A sturdy, tall evergreen tree that grows along the northern Pacific Rim. Its wood was once prized for building ships and musical instruments. Today, Sitka spruce provides a vital habitat for birds, small mammals, and amphibians.



CALIFORNIA POPPY

When this famous, orange-gold flower blooms in the spring, Californians travel far and wide to take pictures of it. For its sunny-golden color, this is the state's official flower.



REDWOOD

California's giant, awe-inspiring redwood trees cover much of its northern coastline. Thick, tough, and often soggy, redwoods can grow upwards of 375 feet and live for thousands of years.

Getting to California

As it turns out, John Sutter came to California by land *and* sea. He completed the first leg of the trip as part of an expedition with the American Fur Company by rolling across the plains on a wagon train. Food was scarce, and sickness and fatigue were constant problems, but the trip brought Sutter to modern-day Wyoming. There, he hired an Indian boy as a guide and hiked over Idaho's mountains to the Columbia River, which would lead him to Fort Vancouver in modern-day Washington.

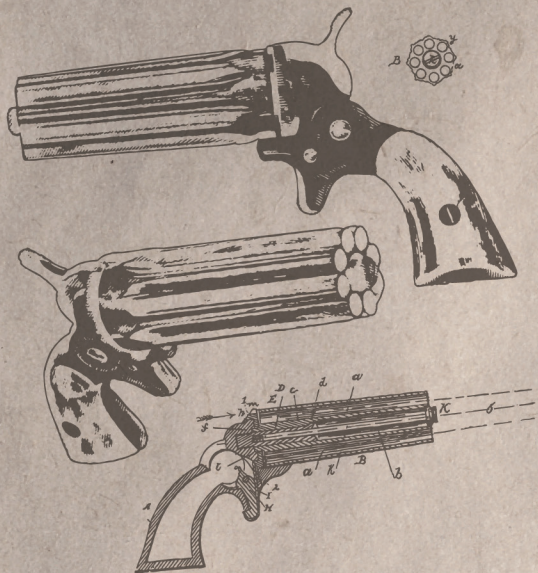
With the Pacific Northwest's tall trees and abundant wildlife, an adventurer from Europe must have thought he was close! However, California was still six hundred miles to the south, and getting there over land would mean crossing the tall Klamath Mountains during winter. Eager to get going, Sutter decided on a less direct way. He hopped on a ship to Hawaii, or as people in the mid-1800s called them, the Sandwich Islands.

Despite the islands being a tropical destination, Sutter didn't treat the trip as a vacation. Along the way, "Captain John Sutter" made important connections with government officials and people who would finance his plan for a new colony. Upon arrival in Hawaii, Sutter's gift for showmanship and telling wild stories about his most interesting life even impressed the Hawaiian King Kamehameha III. By the time he left, Sutter had recruited ten Hawaiian laborers to help build his new colony. With those ten servants and \$3,000 in start-up capital from a man named William French, Sutter and his team sailed up to a Russian settlement in modern-day Alaska called New Archangel. From there, they took another boat and followed the south-flowing current down the Pacific Coastline to the San Francisco Bay.

At last, he had reached California.

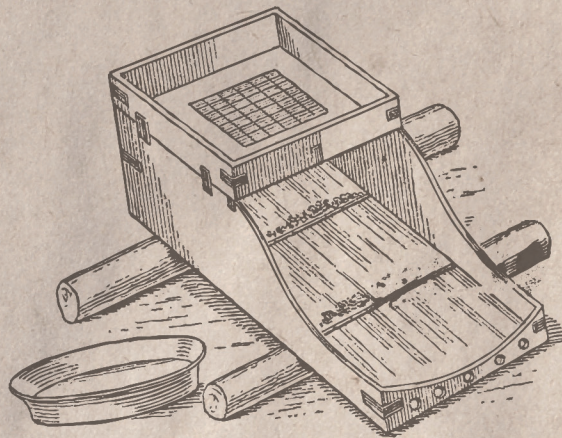


A FIELD GUIDE TO THE WEST COAST & SIERRAS TECHNOLOGY



PEPPERBOX REVOLVER

A handgun with several barrels instead of one. Popular from the 1830s through the Civil War, the pepperbox paved the way for the faster, deadlier revolver pistol.



SLUICE BOX

These simple, wooden troughs helped prospectors search for gold in rushing water by catching mud and gravel.



BLUE JEANS

The next time you wear a pair of blue jeans, thank the Gold Rush. In 1871, Jacob W. Davis and Levi Strauss cut pants out of a tough material called denim and sold them to miners. Those ripped, stylish jeans at the store would come much later.



PICKAXE

A solid, T-shaped tool with a metal head. If you're prying open rocks and boulders to search for gold, the sturdy pickaxe is a must-have.

... and Getting Started

Mexico was not giving land in its northernmost territory to just *anyone*. To receive permission to own land in Alta California, one had to be a Mexican citizen, Roman Catholic, and committed to furthering Mexico's interests in the region. Authorities wanted settlers' help in stopping Indian raids and also hoped to keep eager Americans from moving into the territory.

Sutter made his way to the seat of government, Mexico's **Custom House** in Monterey. There, and with letters of recommendation from people he'd met, he had to convince Governor Juan Batista de Alvarado that he would be a capable commander of a new colony. Again, Sutter's hustle and **charisma** prevailed. When Alvarado awarded him about 50,000 acres of land, he promptly bought a schooner, several launch boats, and sailed up the Sacramento River to claim his prize.

Sailing through the tricky **California Delta** and up the river took days. Along the way, the expedition met Indians; they proved helpful, but communicating with them slowed down the search for a good location. That spot turned out to be the confluence of the Sacramento and American Rivers.

Once they landed, one of Sutter's first steps was setting up a cannon and shooting it off to impress (and no doubt, terrify) the Indians who lived nearby. Tools and equipment for a tannery, a threshing floor, and a blacksmith's shop were brought in. Sutter's team of Hawaiian and Indian workers got busy building the fort's first structure—a one-story building with a kitchen, a blacksmith's shop, and living quarters.

Finally, after six years and thousands of miles traveled, Sutter's ambitious dream of running his own colony was coming to life.

Why Was Sutter's Fort Important?

Sutter's Fort quickly became a hub for commerce and development in the wild region. The nearest city, Yerba Buena (modern-day San Francisco), was nearly ninety miles away. People came to the fort for supplies, leisure, employment, and protection.

Location

Sutter built his fort on high ground a mile south of where the American and Sacramento Rivers connect. This meant the fort could withstand high waters during winter flooding and be seen by land or river up to two miles away.

Structure

Sutter's Fort was built in a rectangle, with adobe walls made of clay, straw, and sand. A coat of **limewash** protected those walls from the elements. Inside the rectangle, a building that served as living quarters is still standing.

Trading Center

Some of the fort's rooms served as shops for merchants selling crops, beaver pelts, or other commodities. With the fort's cooper's shop, blacksmith's shop, gristmill, and carpentry, merchants also had access to tools that weren't available anywhere else.

The fort's role as a trading post attracted fur trappers from as far north as Oregon. This ramped up the local economy and helped put California on the nation's map.



Blacksmith's Shop

Need a horseshoe? How about a barrel full of nails? The fort's busy blacksmith's shop had what you needed or could make it. Here, with a furnace that heated metal up to 3,000 degrees, workers forged or repaired everyday tools. Everything from shovels, pans, pickaxes, traps, and saws to kitchen utensils could be found here—but if you wanted that barrel full of nails, you needed help from the **carpentry**.

Mexican Civil Flag

As a Mexican regional representative of the Mexican government, Sutter did not fly the American flag. Instead, he flew the Mexican civil flag for official visitors—a design used by merchants that looked very similar to Mexico's flag.

On July 11th, 1846, the Mexican civil flag was taken down thanks to the Bear Flag Revolt.

Cannons

While the fort was never attacked, bandits and Indian attacks were common in the area. To counter lawlessness, the fort's mounted cannons served as a sign of force and authority.

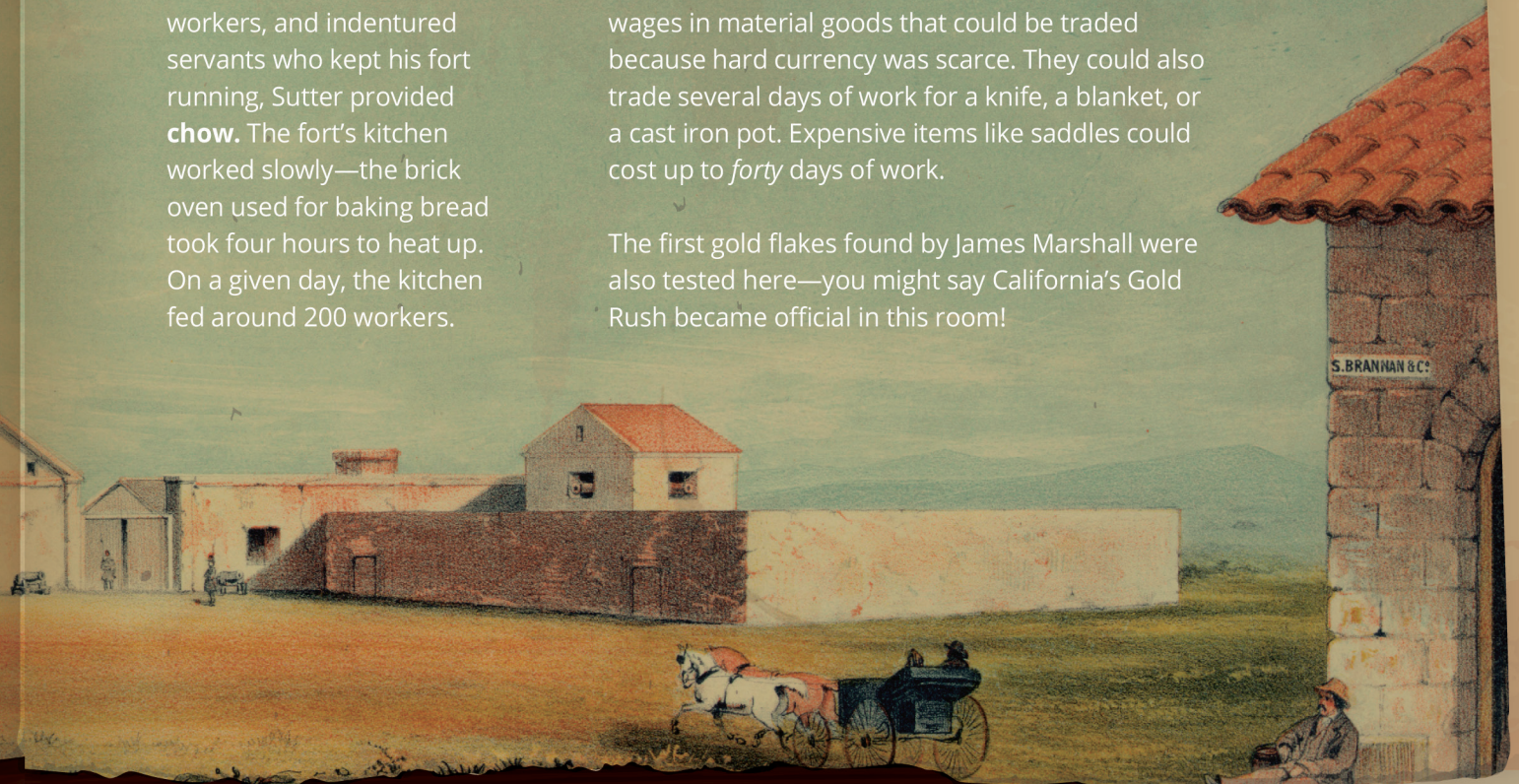
Kitchen

Come and get it! As part of his deal with ranch hands, Indian workers, and indentured servants who kept his fort running, Sutter provided **chow**. The fort's kitchen worked slowly—the brick oven used for baking bread took four hours to heat up. On a given day, the kitchen fed around 200 workers.

Clerk's Office

Payday? Signing a contract? Head on over to the clerk's office. Here, the fort's workers took their wages in material goods that could be traded because hard currency was scarce. They could also trade several days of work for a knife, a blanket, or a cast iron pot. Expensive items like saddles could cost up to *forty* days of work.

The first gold flakes found by James Marshall were also tested here—you might say California's Gold Rush became official in this room!

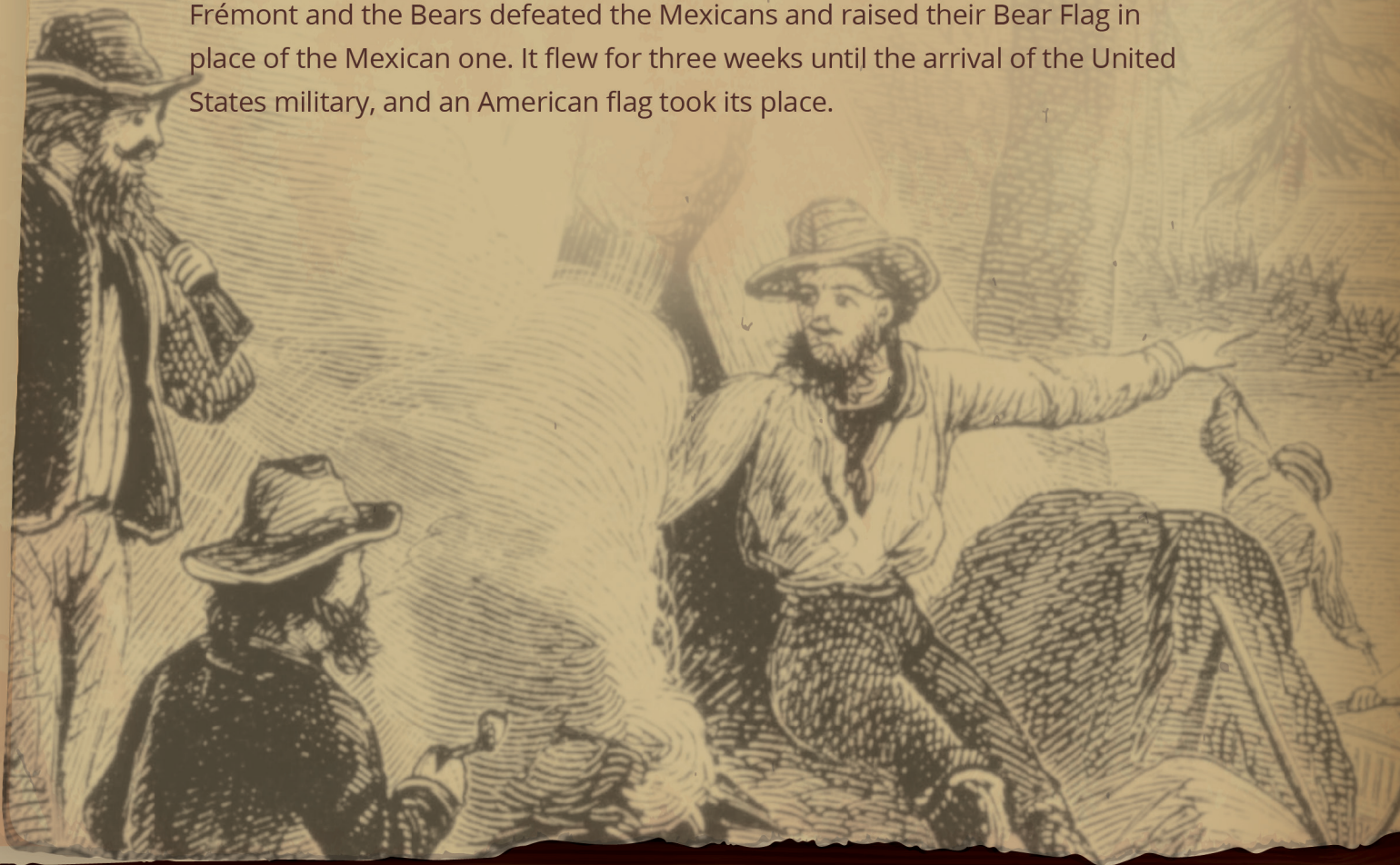


Bad News "Bears"

By 1846, Sutter's Fort was a popular destination for American pioneers, and Mexican authorities were not happy. Men like John Sutter were representatives of the Mexican government; they were supposed to *stop* Americans from coming out, not attract them. With the rising number of non-Mexican settlers arriving at Sutter's colony, it was time to take action.

In April of 1846, a new governor named José Castro issued a proclamation: all non-Mexican settlers had to leave California by the end of the year. This sparked worry in the settlers, and meetings began taking place at Sutter's Fort. U.S. Army Captain John Frémont encouraged revolt, and he and a group of men nicknamed the "Bears" (after the flag they created to represent California) rode west to take over the Mexican barracks in Sonoma.

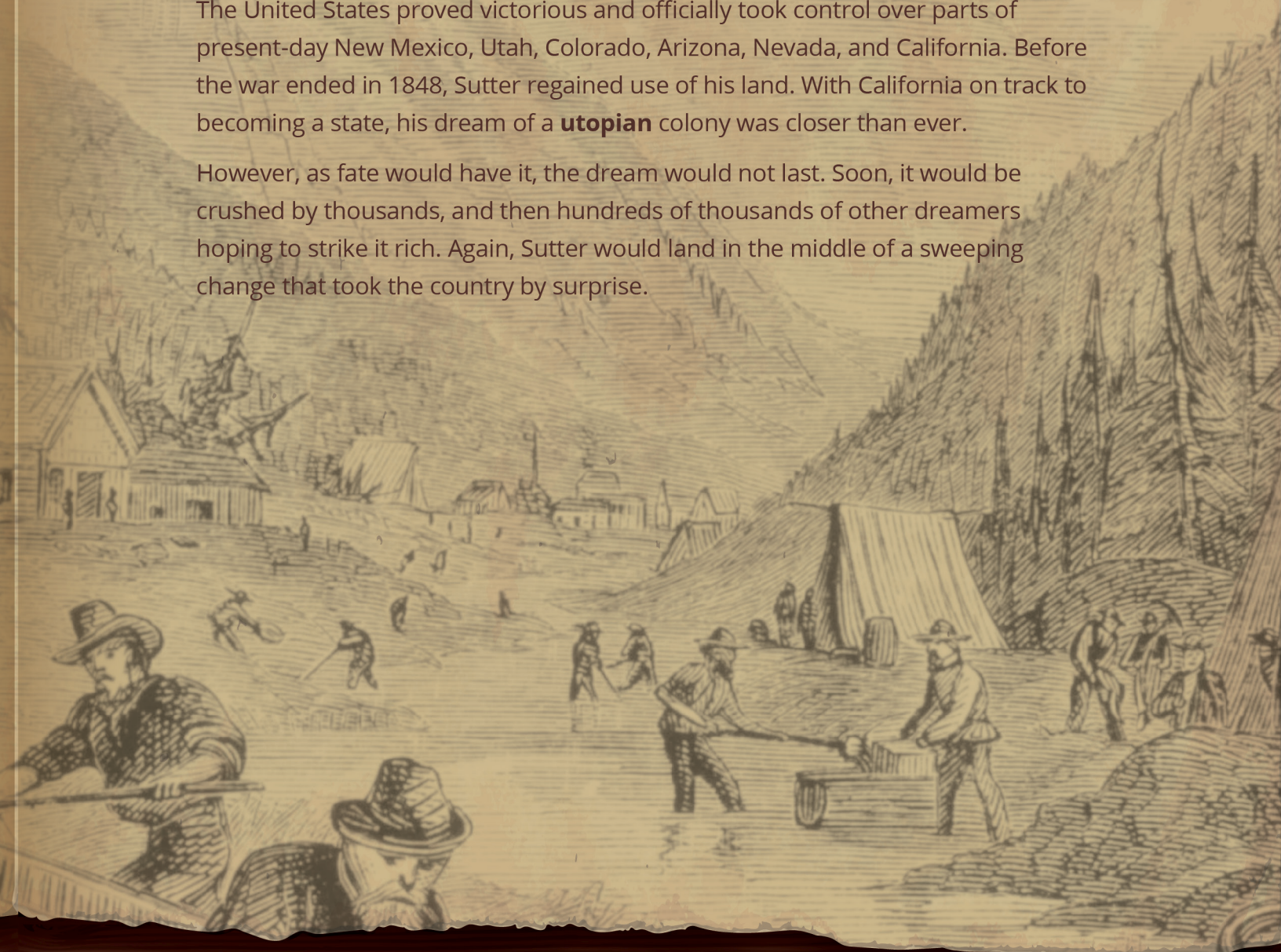
Frémont and the Bears defeated the Mexicans and raised their Bear Flag in place of the Mexican one. It flew for three weeks until the arrival of the United States military, and an American flag took its place.



Soon, disputes over land and borders in multiple places broke out between the U.S. and Mexico, and by April 25, 1846, the Mexican-American War was underway. California was among the battlegrounds of the war, and U.S. forces used Sutter's Fort as an outpost and a prison. Sutter's land and livestock also helped feed American soldiers during the conflict.

After two years of fighting, the Mexican-American war ended on February 2, 1848. The United States proved victorious and officially took control over parts of present-day New Mexico, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, Nevada, and California. Before the war ended in 1848, Sutter regained use of his land. With California on track to becoming a state, his dream of a **utopian** colony was closer than ever.

However, as fate would have it, the dream would not last. Soon, it would be crushed by thousands, and then hundreds of thousands of other dreamers hoping to strike it rich. Again, Sutter would land in the middle of a sweeping change that took the country by surprise.



If Word Gets Out...

Clerk's Office, Sutter's Fort, January 1848

"Well, whaddya think?" the carpenter named James murmured, tugging at his beard.

Without speaking, John closed the heavy door behind them. Some light from the window's edge escaped and brightened the floor, but it was dark enough for a test. The smells of ink, musty paper, and dried candle wax floated around them.

"Let's see," John said, laying the ragged cloth on a table. Gently, as if he were nursing a wound, he tugged the cloth flat. *Yep, there it was.* The orange-yellow flakes were no larger than clumps of rice, but the gleam was unmistakable.

John waved James over to join him. Having ridden forty miles and brought what he'd found on the river directly to the fort, the carpenter had earned a proper look. Over the next thirty minutes, they ran tests with water, balance scales, and even nitric acid. Through every test, the flakes glistened back at them; this was gold all right.

"It's gold," John said finally. "At least twenty-three carat."

The two men laughed and smiled, but then John's tone grew serious.

"Mark what I say," he whispered. "If word gets out, you or I won't see a penny from this. But if you do exactly what I tell you..."

The plan made sense. But the itching, restless look in the carpenter's eyes told John it would never work. The crisp dollar bill he'd given James to buy his silence might slow it down, but sooner or later, word *would* get out.

The carpenter left, and as Sutter stood in the doorway, his mind drifted. For a moment, the fear melted away.

New tools, he thought, imagining what the discovery could mean. Debts paid off. A whole team of miners working my claims along the river, and gold nuggets coming in every day... enough of them for this place to make it. Enough, maybe, to bring Anna and the children over on first-class tickets.

He tucked the cloth with the gold flakes inside his jacket.

On January 24th, 1848, a few days before Sutter and his carpenter James Marshall spoke, California changed forever. Marshall, or one of his six workers, spotted gold flakes in the water as it slipped through the **tailrace**—the wooden trough that funneled water out of the sawmill they'd been building on the American River.

The sawmill, of course, belonged to John Sutter. Even though the building site was outside the boundaries of his land grant, Sutter had selected it and its plentiful supply of pine trees as a perfect spot for a mill. In the days after the discovery, Sutter himself came out to inspect the yellow flakes that littered the streambed.

Sure enough, more gold was there.



Golden State Scramble

Sutter knew he didn't have a lot of time to take advantage of James Marshall's golden discovery. He wanted to get a headstart on mining, but Sutter was unable to secure legal rights for a **land claim** around the area where gold had been spotted. Sure enough, rumors of gold in California began spreading like wildfire, and Sutter would have to scramble like anyone else to secure places to search for fortune.

But Sutter's misfortune was everyone else's opportunity. When evidence of the gold discovery reached San Francisco, the news kicked off one of the world's fastest **mass migrations**. Gold-hungry Americans from all over and immigrants from as far away as Europe and China quit their jobs and bid their families goodbye. In less than a decade, the Gold Rush transformed the region completely. Towns like San Francisco, and later Sacramento, quickly grew into cities, and the "Golden State" of California was now squarely on America's map.

The migration also created the need for new technology. Innovations in mining, railroad construction, and communication boomed. In the following decades, businessmen, oilmen, farmers, and even entertainers were all coming out. Word of the **Central Valley's** rich, fertile soil and cheap land all the way south to Los Angeles brought more waves of people. All this growth and innovation would brand California as a place where those with grit and hustle could get a fresh start... and perhaps make a fortune.

GOLD RUSH FACTS

AS MUCH AS
750,000
POUNDS OF GOLD
came out of California from 1849 to 1857. Judging by today's gold price of \$2,500 an ounce, the estimated worth of all that gold would be well over a trillion dollars.

During the Gold Rush, Yerba Buena became a chaotic
BOOM TOWN

called "San Francisco."
A man named **WASHINGTON ALLON BARTLETT**, appointed by Mexico as a regional magistrate, renamed the city in **1847.**

In 1849 alone, around **40,000** travelers made their way to California by ship. So many prospectors came out in 1849 that they earned the nickname

"Forty-Niners."

AROUND 300,000 people came to California during the Gold Rush. Around 98 percent of those who came out were men.

CALIFORNIA WAS NOT A SLAVE STATE, and it sided with the northern "Union" states during the Civil War. Despite being across the country from the conflict, California's gold fields played a huge role. Shipments of gold to the East Coast helped to control inflation and finance the Union government's war effort against the South.

THE INFUX OF NEW ARRIVALS RAISED SAN FRANCISCO'S POPULATION FROM
800
PEOPLE TO OVER **20,000**
IN LESS THAN **TWO YEARS.**

Many ships that arrived in San Francisco were abandoned. Residents took to sinking them or taking them apart and using the wood as building materials. To this day, excavations in San Francisco reveal parts of old ships built over and forgotten during the city's fast expansion.



LIFE OF A FORTY NINER

Living quarters

- ◆ Prospectors could be living outdoors by themselves or in a camp with others.
- ◆ Cloth tent, staked into the ground close to a river.
- ◆ Simple bedrolls or blankets stuffed with springy pine boughs.

Clothing

- ◆ Cotton, long-sleeve shirt.
- ◆ Leather boots and wool socks.
- ◆ Wide brim hat to protect eyes.
- ◆ Tough denim pants (blue jeans), created by an immigrant named Levi Strauss to sell to prospectors.

Animals

- ◆ Horses and donkeys were used to transport items and supplies over the gold fields.

Food

- ◆ Not great. Basic food items were very expensive, so many prospectors hunted, fished... or went hungry.
- ◆ Sourdough starter bread, cooked in a pan or a Dutch oven.
- ◆ Chop suey (leftover meat and rice). Chinese immigrants served chop suey to prospectors, who made it popular.

Tools

- ◆ Pick, shovel, axe.
- ◆ Trowel, wheelbarrow.
- ◆ A wide tin pan used to swirl around dirt and water for gold flakes (panning for gold).
- ◆ Washboard, used for washing clothes in creek or river.
- ◆ Revolver pistol for protection.
- ◆ Pouch and leather strap, worn on the body at all times (any gold found goes here).

Technology

- ◆ Sluice: a wooden trough or a ditch that funnels a stream of water, gravel, and hopefully, gold flakes.
- ◆ Dynamite stick: used for blasting rock and opening up more areas to search.
- ◆ Stamping mill: used to smash boulders and rock.
- ◆ Hose and nozzle: beginning in 1853, gold prospectors began spraying hillsides with high-pressure water hoses. This technology helped them sift through dirt and gravel to find gold at a faster scale but damaged the landscape by eroding hillsides.




Crash and Burn

Gold spread the California dream far and wide, but for most people, the vision of easy riches proved to be a mirage. The mass migration to California caused prices for food, tools, and clothing to rise. Among those who found gold, few found enough of it to become rich... or even pay for their day-to-day supplies.

Instead, those who seized opportunities to sell goods and services to prospectors saw their fortunes rise. With small communities sprouting into towns and cities, many who bought land, grew food, or started a business instead of looking for gold fared very well. California's first millionaire was a man named Sam Brannan, a merchant who sold tin pans, pickaxes, and mining gear to prospectors at Sutter's Fort.

In the midst of all these changes, "Captain John Sutter" fell into misfortune. Soon, the workers he'd been paying to tend livestock and maintain the fort left to search for gold. Cattle and other animals went missing—likely stolen. Worst of all, he was no longer able to keep people off his land or go and claim any piece of land he wanted. Again, and worse than before, the debts piled up.

Before long, Sutter's dream of New Switzerland was in shambles.



"My men were crushed by the iron heel of civilization. My cattle were driven off by hungry gold-seekers; my fort and mills were deserted and left to decay; my lands were squatted on by overland immigrants; and finally, I was cheated out of all my property. All Sacramento was once mine."

—John Sutter

The Bitter End

Sutter's Fort, February 1849

Before he left, John looked around.

What a shabby sight. The walls looked moth-eaten. Here and there, the limewash coat had torn away, revealing the crumbling bricks. Aside from a card game going on in the tannery, all the shops were vacant. Doors were flopped open, some hanging on one hinge like torn clothing. Tumbleweeds and broken bottles littered the ground.

John sighed. A year ago, the fort had been a hopping place full of people and activity. Farmers, merchants, and **vaqueros** passed through with herds of cattle. *How had it come to this?* The men playing cards were cackling like hyenas.

At the top of the wooden stairs, John glanced over the fort's walls. Out ahead of him, the weeds were chest-high. Fences that once held cows were crooked and broken. It wasn't evening yet, but **squatter's** campfires already dotted the horizon.

John shook his head.



Outside the fort, his horses were harnessed, and the wagon was waiting for him. Some forty-three miles to the north, near a town that is now called Yuba City, his workers were getting **Hock Farm** ready. As of yesterday, the sale of the fort and surrounding land for \$7,000 was legal and binding.

"Ready?" John's oldest son, nicknamed "August," asked.

John nodded. August reached a hand down and helped him onto the wagon. With the horses clopping and the wagon bobbling away, John thought about the future. Arrangements for Anna and his other children to join them on Hock Farm were already in place.

At last, John thought, smiling through the sadness. Though it was not how he pictured it, he could not wait to see them again, to show them California's rivers, mountains, and growing cities. When they get here, he decided, it will be paradise... and the adventure will start all over again.

More Misfortune

Like his dream of a colony, John Sutter's final paradise did not last. Life with his family on Hock Farm was pleasant for a time. To compensate for all his losses, and for his role in the state's history, California's government awarded him a small monthly **pension**. But tragedy struck again in 1865 when an angry neighbor burned Sutter's house down.

In one more adventure, Sutter and his family moved to Pennsylvania. There, Sutter made trips to Washington, D.C., to ask the U.S. government for compensation. He kept trying but was unsuccessful. Poor but famous, a seventy-seven-year-old John Sutter died on June 18, 1880 in the Mades Hotel in Washington, D.C.

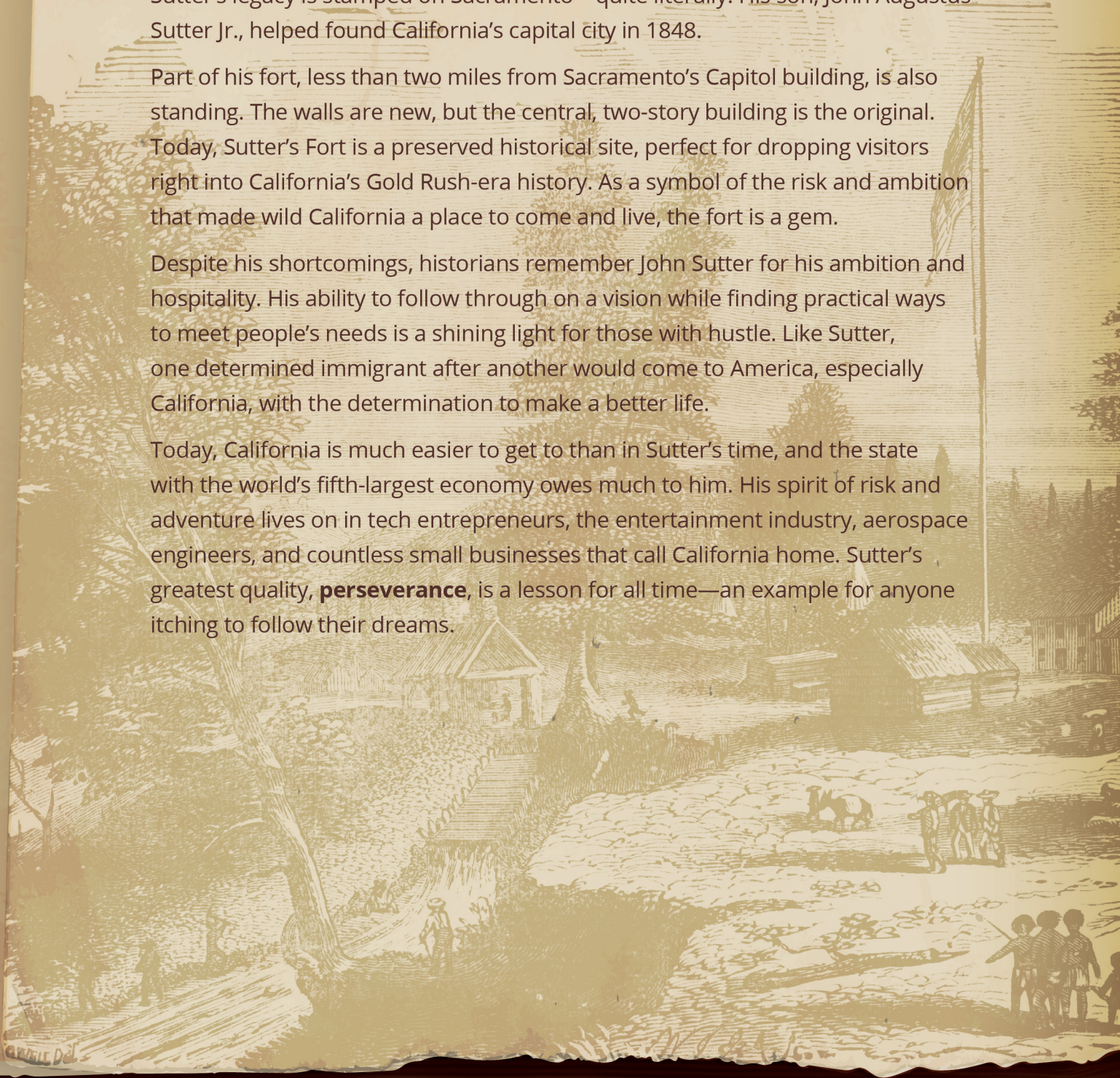
Still Standing

Sutter's legacy is stamped on Sacramento—quite literally. His son, John Augustus Sutter Jr., helped found California's capital city in 1848.

Part of his fort, less than two miles from Sacramento's Capitol building, is also standing. The walls are new, but the central, two-story building is the original. Today, Sutter's Fort is a preserved historical site, perfect for dropping visitors right into California's Gold Rush-era history. As a symbol of the risk and ambition that made wild California a place to come and live, the fort is a gem.

Despite his shortcomings, historians remember John Sutter for his ambition and hospitality. His ability to follow through on a vision while finding practical ways to meet people's needs is a shining light for those with hustle. Like Sutter, one determined immigrant after another would come to America, especially California, with the determination to make a better life.

Today, California is much easier to get to than in Sutter's time, and the state with the world's fifth-largest economy owes much to him. His spirit of risk and adventure lives on in tech entrepreneurs, the entertainment industry, aerospace engineers, and countless small businesses that call California home. Sutter's greatest quality, **perseverance**, is a lesson for all time—an example for anyone itching to follow their dreams.



Glossary

Alta California: The northernmost province of Mexico during the early 19th century. Alta, or "Upper" California, included parts of Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming.

Bear Flag Revolt: A settler rebellion in northern California during the Mexican-American War that led to the creation of the Bear Flag Republic, or the Republic of California, as an independent nation in 1846. The name came from their flag, which featured a bear facing a lone star. The republic only kept its independence for 25 days before being claimed by the United States.

California Delta: A low-lying land formation where California's Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers feed into the San Francisco Bay and eventually the Pacific Ocean.

California Gold Rush: A mass migration of settlers moving west to California to find gold. The migration began when gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill on the American River in 1848 and peaked in the early 1850s.

Californios: Spanish for "California resident." "Californio" was the name for Spanish-speaking people who lived in the territory when it was part of Mexico.

Cape Horn: A rocky formation on Hornos Island, Chile. Cape Horn is near the southern tip of South America, a landmark for those making the rough, dangerous voyage around the continent and up to North America.

Carpentry: The skill of building and repairing wooden structures. Carpenters use tools to shape, cut, and join wood into everyday items like furniture or frames for houses.

Central Valley: A large, flat region that runs north and south through the middle of California. The Central Valley is known for its fertile soil and for being one of the most productive farming regions in the world.

Charisma: Special charm or appeal that makes people like someone.

Chow: Slang for "food," or a hearty meal.

Confluence: The place where two rivers meet and flow together.

Courting: Trying to win someone's affection in a formal, romantic way.

Creditor: A person or company that lends money and expects to be paid back.

Custom House: A building where taxes are collected on goods coming into a country. The Monterey Custom House was built in 1827, and it functioned as an outpost for the United States government from 1846 to 1868.

Donner Party: A group of pioneers who got stuck in the snow during the winter of 1846 to 1847 while traveling from the Midwest to California. The Donner Party faced horrific hardships.

Excavations: The process of digging up and exploring ancient sites to find old objects or buildings.

Forty-Niners: The nickname given to people who rushed to California during the Gold Rush, hoping to strike it rich by finding gold. The term refers to the year 1849, which saw a dramatic increase in new arrivals.

Great Basin: A 200,000-square-mile area in North America that includes most of Nevada, half of Utah, and sections of Idaho, Wyoming, Oregon, and California. Water drains internally and has no outlet to the ocean or Gulf of Mexico. The water evaporates, absorbs, or goes into nearby lakes. The region's climate is usually hot and dry.

Gringo: A Spanish word often used to describe a foreigner, especially someone from the United States.



Glossary

Haberdashery: A store that sells men's clothing and accessories, like hats and ties.

Hock Farm: John Sutter's farm near Yuba City, California. After selling his fort in 1849, Sutter moved to Hock Farm with his family, where he grew crops and raised animals.

Isthmus: A narrow strip of land connecting two larger land areas, often with water on either side.

Land Claim: A legal declaration stating that a person owns a piece of land. In frontier history, settlers often made land claims by simply settling in new territory.

Limewash: Paint made from lime and water. In the 19th century, limewash was cheap to make and used to coat the outside walls of buildings to protect them from the weather.

Launch Boat: A small boat used to move from a ship to the shore or for shorter trips.

Magistrate: A local official who has some judicial powers, such as hearing minor cases or overseeing the law in a small community. A magistrate might handle small disputes or minor crimes.

Mass Migration: A large movement of people from one place or region to another. Mass Migrations are often caused by war, natural disasters, or economic factors.

New World: The name used by Europeans for North and South America after they were discovered in the late 15th century.

Oregon Trail: A 2,170-mile route that connected the Missouri River to the Oregon Territory. It was one of two main east-west wagon routes that settlers traveled during the 1840s-1860s.

Pension: A regular payment made to support someone during their retirement.

Perseverance: Continuing to work hard and not give up, even when things are difficult.

Sawmill: A place where logs are cut into boards and planks. In the mid-1800s, many sawmills, including Sutter's, were powered by flowing water.

Schooner: A popular sailing ship with two or more masts. Schooners were invented in the 17th century but were used to carry people and cargo throughout the 19th century.

Squatters: People who settle on land without legal permission or ownership. During frontier times, squatters remained on land they didn't legally own in hopes of eventually gaining ownership.

Tailrace: A channel that carries water away from a mill or a water wheel after it has been used to turn the machinery. The tailrace was an important part of the water system that powered mills like Sutter's.

Tenacity: Determination; not giving up easily.

Utopian: Modeled after an idea of a perfect (or near-perfect) human society.

Vaquero: Spanish for "cowboy." Before California became a state, cattle drivers and ranch hands were called "vaqueros."

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