

The California Gold Rush

BEFORE YOU READ

In the last section, you read how the War with Mexico extended the United States westward.

In this section, you will learn how the gold rush affected California.

TERMS & NAMES

Californio A California settler of Spanish or Mexican descent

families in America

John Sutter A California settler on whose land gold was found

James Marshall A carpenter who found gold at Sutter's Mill

California gold rush Occurred when large numbers of people moved to California to find gold, starting in 1849

California Before the Rush

After gold was discovered in California, many people decided to become **forty-niners**, or people who went to California to find gold, starting in 1849. Before the forty-niners came, California had about 150,000 Native Americans and 6,000 **Californios**—California settlers of Spanish or Mexican descent. Most **Californios** lived on huge cattle ranches. One important **Californio** was **Mariano Vallejo**. He was a member of one of the oldest Spanish families in America and owned 250,000 acres of land.

Mexico did not give land to foreigners. But **John Sutter**, a Swiss immigrant, persuaded the Mexican governor of California to grant him 50,000 acres in the Sacramento Valley. In 1848, Sutter sent a carpenter named **James Marshall** to build a sawmill on the nearby American River. One day, as he was inspecting the canal that brought water to Sutter's Mill, Marshall found gold.

1. What was a forty-niner and what did they do?

Rush for Gold (page 413)

What happened after Marshall's discovery?

Once news of Marshall's discovery spread, people raced to the American River. This started the **California gold rush**. A gold rush occurs when large numbers of people move to a site where gold has been found.

Miners soon found gold in other streams flowing out of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Thousands of gold seekers set out to find their fortune. Forty-niners traveling from the East faced a dangerous journey on one of three routes. Some sailed around South

America and up the Pacific coast. Others sailed to the Isthmus of Panama, crossed overland, and then sailed to California. Still others traveled the trails across North America.

2 Explain the three ways people traveled to California to search for gold.

Life in the Mining Camps

Mining camps started out as rows of tents. Gradually, the tents gave way to rough wooden buildings that housed stores and saloons. Life in the mining camps was dangerous and hard. Although a few miners grew rich overnight, most did not. Miners spent their days standing knee-deep in icy streams, sifting through mud and sand to find gold. Miners faced exhaustion, poor food, and disease.

In addition to having a difficult life, miners paid high prices for supplies. Gamblers and con artists worked the mining camps and swindled miners out of their money. As a result, few miners grew rich.

3 Explain three reasons why life as a gold miner was difficult.

Miners from Around the World; Conflicts Among Miners

Most of the forty-niners were Americans. However, Native Americans, free blacks, and enslaved African

Americans also worked the mines. In addition, miners came from Mexico, Europe, South America, Australia, and China. Most of the Chinese miners were farmers who left China because of several crop failures there. By the end of 1851, one of every ten immigrants was Chinese.

Often the Chinese miners took over sites that American miners had abandoned because the easy-to-find gold was gone. Through hard work, the Chinese yielded profits from the used sites. American miners resented the success of the Chinese, and anger toward the Chinese miners grew.

The California Gold Rush *continued*

Once the easy-to-find gold was gone, Americans began to force Native Americans and foreigners out of the gold field to reduce competition. After California became a state in 1850, it passed the Foreign Miners tax. This called for miners from other countries to pay \$20 a month. Most foreigners could not pay it and were forced to leave the mine fields.

4. Why did Americans resent or dislike Chinese miners?

The Impact of the Gold Rush

(pages 416–417)

How did the gold rush affect Californios?

The gold rush ended in 1852. But the huge migration to California changed the state permanently. San Francisco became an important center of banking and manufacturing. Sacramento became an important farming region. The gold rush also ruined many Californios. The newcomers did not respect them or their rights. They also seized the property of Californios. However, Spanish heritage became an important part of California culture.

Many Native Americans died from diseases brought by newcomers. The miners hunted down and killed thousands more. As a result, by 1870 the Native American population fell from 150,000 to 58,000.

By 1849, California had enough people to apply for statehood. The United States admitted California as a free state in 1850. This upset the balance between free states and slave states, with free states outnumbering slave states.

5. How did the gold rush affect the Native Americans?