

## Chapter 14

# New Lands and New Ideas

### THE WESTWARD MIGRATION LEADS TO WAR WITH MEXICO

THE OREGON TRAIL passed through the northern tip of Mexican territory. The immigrants on this trail aroused no active hostility from that country because the land being trespassed was not settled. Migration to the southwest, to Texas in particular, however, was a different story. It increased the tension between Anglo Americans and Latin Americans that had been brewing since the two peoples first met on the borders of their territories. Immigrants to this area before 1821 faced the displeasure of Spanish officials of Mexico. In 1821 the Mexicans finally succeeded in gaining independence from Spain. The new Mexican officials resented the invasion of traders and settlers from the United States just as much as the Spanish had resented it when they had governed Mexico.

In 1797, the year that Washington had retired from the Presidency, Philip Nolan, a young Irish immigrant from the United States had gained permission from the Spanish governor of the northern province of Mexico to hunt wild horses on the plains of eastern Texas. He sold the captured

mustangs for cavalry mounts to General Wilkinson of the United States Army, stationed in the territory of Mississippi.

Several years later Philip Nolan returned to Texas with a party of twenty frontiersmen on another mustang hunt. He built pens to hold the wild horses and then erected a blockhouse for protection. This bold venture annoyed the New Spanish governor of the province. He sent soldiers to drive out the party. The Irishman decided to fight and was killed by the first cannon shot that struck his blockhouse. After a battle of several hours the rest of the hunters surrendered on the promise that they would be free to return to the United States. Instead, they were marched to San Antonio, capital of the province, and then across the Rio Grande to pass weary years in wretched Mexican prisons.

One of these prisoners was an adventurous frontiersman named Ellis Bean. At the age of sixteen Bean left his farm home in Tennessee with a flatboat load of flour, tobacco, hams, and other items to sell in New Orleans. His boat capsized in the treacherous Muscle Shoals in the Tennessee River. Bean lost his produce, escaping with only the clothes on his back. On a neighbor's boat he continued

the journey. At Natchez on the Mississippi, he met Philip Nolan recruiting a party to hunt wild horses in Texas. This smacked of adventure and appealed to the farm lad. Bean joined the hunters. In the blockhouse fight he was in command when the group was forced to surrender.

Like most farm boys on the frontier young Bean was a jack-of-all-trades. When he was moved from jail to jail, he managed to get liberty by practicing his trades. In one town he made shoes; in another, hats. While in jail at Acapulco, the Mexican port on the Pacific, Bean learned that the town officials were looking for a man to blast rocks for improvements planned in the harbor district. He sent word that blasting was his specialty, although he really knew little or nothing about it. He figured he could learn to do anything that would win his freedom. Being ingenious he succeeded in blasting the rocks. He also escaped from his guard during the confusion. He hid away in a barrel on a vessel in the harbor, but the Portuguese cook betrayed him and he was returned to jail.

When revolutions broke out in Mexico, a Spanish officer promised Bean his freedom if he would join the loyalist army. A man who could blast rocks into bits might prove useful in quelling the revolt against Spanish authority. Bean snatched this opportunity for freedom but soon deserted to join the revolutionary forces of Morelos. He made guns and ammunition for Morelos who promoted him to the rank of colonel. Bean commanded the rebel troops that captured the port of Acapulco where he had been so long in prison. He treated his captives so kindly that he made friends out of enemies.

The aid given by citizens of the United States to Mexicans fighting for independence created a bond of sympathy between

the two peoples. This tie was weakened when enterprising Yankees began to appear almost everywhere in Mexican territory.

A party of trappers from the states found beaver plentiful along the Colorado River. Their load became so heavy that they buried hundreds of skins on a hillside above the stream, intending to return later with more. They would take the furs north to the summer rendezvous. The trappers chanced upon some Mexican soldiers who arrested them and took them in to San Diego for trial. After six months in jail the trappers were freed with a warning to leave Mexican territory. Returning to the cache of beaver pelts, the trappers found that while the stream looked the same as when they had last seen it, the precious furs were soaked and ruined under a coating of slimy mud. During their imprisonment, the Colorado River had flooded in the spring as it annually did.

A large percentage of these Yankee tradesmen headed for the city of Santa Fe, now the capital of New Mexico. At that time it was the seat of government and the trade center of this northern province of Mexico. Before United States traders were on the scene, Santa Fe received its merchandise from Chihuahua in Mexico. Merchants put their goods on the backs of mules and traveled 230 miles from Chihuahua to El Paso, where they crossed the Rio Grande, and 320 miles farther to the northern capital. This long hard route through desert country, where both man and beast suffered from hunger and thirst, made the goods expensive. Common brown muslin sold for \$3 a yard. When Lewis and Clark were on their way into the Northwest, a French Creole packed the first goods from the states to Santa Fe. The traders from the states were eager to

compete with their Mexican neighbors for the flourishing business in Santa Fe.

By 1822 caravans of pack mules were leaving the frontier post of Independence, Missouri. They traveled southwest along the Arkansas River and blazed the Santa Fe Trail.

By 1824 a company of traders used wagons for the first time on this trade route into Mexican territory. With the usual train of pack mules were twenty-five wagons and carts, hauling \$30,000 worth of goods. The heavy wagons were drawn by eight mules each. The canvas tops were padded with blankets to protect the merchandise from the wind and rain. During the twenty years of this overland trade \$3,000,000 worth of goods was transported across the plains and sold in Santa Fe and other Mexican towns as far south as Chihuahua. On the return trips the wagons were usually loaded with gold and silver bullion from Mexican mines. To prevent robbery, well-armed guards rode in front and behind the caravans. Every man slept with his gun at his side. Sometimes, a prairie fire licked the heels of a wagon train in a wild race to short-grass country where the flames would die out.

In spite of all the hardships and dangers, the prairie traders liked the life. After retiring to his old home in the East, one man wrote:

I am ashamed to confess that scarcely a day passes without a pang of regret that I am not now roving at large upon those western plains. The wild, unsettled, and independent life of the prairie trader makes perfect freedom. He knows no laws, save those of his own. His own conscience is court and jury. He lives in no society which he must look up to and please. The exchange of this independence for a life in civilization, — commends itself to few who have known the freedom of the great western prairies.

The Yankees were shrewd traders and built a big business. In 1846, 375 wagons, 1700 mules, 2000 oxen, and 500 men were on the Santa Fe Trail. In the same year war began with Mexico. However, the actual fighting was not in conflict with the carefree traders who came, bought and sold, and went on their way. The trouble began between the Mexicans and the colonists from the United States who had moved into Mexican territory, plowed the land, built their homes, and STAYED.

## THE NATION STRETCHES WEST AND SOUTH

THE FIRST COLONIZATION of Texas by United States citizens occurred under the leadership of a New England family by the name of Austin. Moses Austin, the father, owned the first factory in the United States for making shot and sheet lead. Learning of rich lead deposits in the West he took his family to Missouri shortly before 1800. After he made a fortune in his new lead mines, a bank failure in St. Louis almost bankrupted him. He then had the idea of starting all over again in Texas.

At this time Spain still governed Texas. Austin journeyed from Missouri to San Antonio, Texas, to petition the Spanish governor there for land upon which he could settle three hundred families. Since his request had to be referred to many Spanish authorities, Austin did not wait in San Antonio for an answer. He left, intending to return to the city at a later date. On the way back to Missouri he was robbed by his traveling companions and was then deserted. In spite of the hardships he managed to reach his daughter's home, but only to die shortly after his arrival.

His son, Stephen Austin, founded the settlement. It lay between the Brazos and the Colorado rivers. Meanwhile, Mexico had declared her independence from Spain and established a republic. Desiring to abide by the laws of the new republic, Stephen Austin rode horseback 1200 miles to the capital of Mexico, arriving near the end of April in 1822. He found the Mexicans fighting among themselves for control of the government. He had to wait one long year in Mexico City before a Congress was able to confirm his land grant and declare the Mexican colonial policy.

When Stephen Austin finally returned from his 2400-mile journey on horseback, he found his colonists scattered and discouraged. Fortunately, newcomers made the colony grow and prosper. In July, 1823 Mexican officials set the date for laying out the capital of Austin's settlement. They named it San Felipe de Austin, now plain Austin, and still the capital of Texas. The generous colonization laws of the Mexican Republic attracted thousands from the United States into Texas. Cheap land in Texas enticed westerners and southerners to sell out and move into Mexican territory.

According to one law, promoters, called "empresarios," were allowed 23,040 acres of land for every hundred families they brought into Texas, receiving their fee in land for themselves. However, no one, not even a Mexican citizen, was permitted to own more than eleven leagues, or about 50,000 acres. A family arriving alone, and not under an empresarios contract, could purchase 4428 acres of pasture land for \$30; and 174 acres for cultivation for as little as \$3.50 if the land could be irrigated.

Difficulties soon arose between the Anglo American settlers and their Mexican authorities. The settlers became impatient

with Mexican ways of governing. They wanted to make their own laws. When the Mexicans were under Spanish rule, they had little or no opportunity to practice self-government. Now that they were an independent country, they found it hard to make laws and harder still to abide by them. When a party in power displeased enough of the people, that party would be overthrown. Consequently, they had frequent revolts.

This lack of a stable government irritated the Anglo Americans, who had inherited a tradition of self-government. During the hundred and fifty years as English colonists the Anglo Americans practically governed themselves. The settlers in Texas felt they would be better off if their governing body was like that of the United States.

The Texans, unwilling to wait while the Mexicans learned, proceeded to make their own laws and govern themselves. Texas was cotton country. The settlers who came from the southern states brought along their slaves. This meant that they were defying the government because Mexico had abolished slavery. This disobedience to law annoyed the Mexican authorities. They felt they must discipline this unruly colony of at least 20,000 inhabitants. In 1836 a new Mexican constitution deprived the colony of any self-government and forbade further immigration from the United States. The Texans refused to accept the decrees. They adopted the slogan "Texas and Liberty!" They raised armies to defend their settlements. Posters appeared in Cincinnati, Louisville, and other western towns, promising large grants of land, free, to settlers in Texas. One line may have discouraged some. It read:

Come with a good rifle, and come soon.

## THE ALAMO IN SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

The city of San Antonio acquired its name from the mission, San Antonio de Valero, founded nearby in 1691 to bring Christianity to the Indians. After moving twice to seek a better location, the Spanish missionaries built a larger San Antonio de Valero on land now in the center of the city.

When the missions in Texas ceased operations in 1794, the mission was used for barracks by Spanish soldiers from Alamo de Parras in Mexico. The name was shortened to Alamo.

After winning independence from Spain, Mexico claimed all of Texas. Meanwhile, some people from the United States had moved into Texas. When Santa Anna, leader of Mexico, marched his army north in 1836, he found the Alamo guarded by a small army of newcomers, including David Crockett, James Bowie, and Colonel William Travis. After a siege of thirteen days, all the defenders had died in the Alamo, but the delay gave General Sam Houston time to gather an army at San Jacinto to defeat Santa Anna. Texans cherish the Alamo as a shrine of liberty.

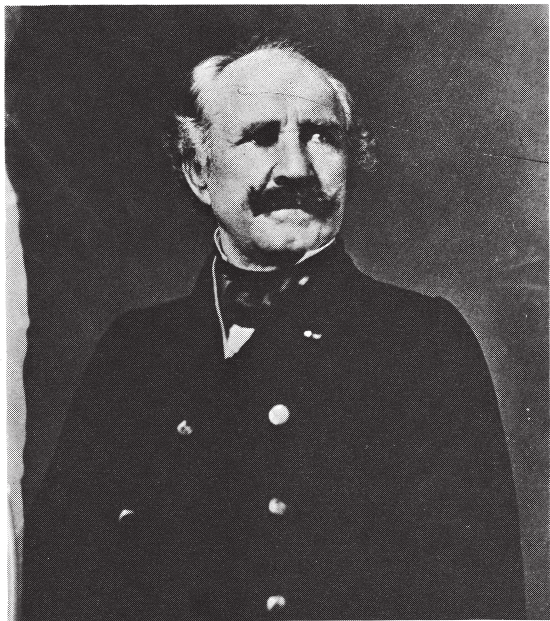
*San Antonio Chamber of Commerce*



When Santa Anna, the new President of Mexico, marched soldiers into Texas, a short but bloody war began. In all, it is claimed, 188 Texans fought and died in the Alamo, the old fort in San Antonio. Forty-six days later Santa Anna was defeated at the Battle of San Jacinto, near the eastern border, by a little army of Texans under General Sam Houston of Tennessee. Texas became a republic with a constitution permitting slavery. Sam Houston, a former governor of Tennessee, was elected the first president of the “lone star” republic. This happened in 1836 during the last year of Jackson’s Administration and the year that the Whitmans crossed the plains to Oregon.

Since most of the Texans had come from the United States, they wanted to reacquire their American citizenship. They asked the United States Government to annex Texas as a state. The United States Congress then had to decide whether or not to admit Texas to the Union. Many people in the country wanted to live in the West as citizens of the United States. Some of these people were southern planters who had worn out their land by planting the same crops year after year. Others were merchants and farmers made bankrupt by the Panic of 1837. They wanted to make a fresh start in the West. These groups rallied behind the Democratic Party, which openly advocated annexation of Texas in the Presidential election of 1844.

The people opposing the annexation felt that this move would involve their country in a war with Mexico. Many of them did not want to see Texas as a part of the United States because it would mean that slavery would spread. These groups voted for Clay, the Whig party leader, because he did not include annexation in his campaign promises.



*Barker Texas History Library*

**GENERAL SAM HOUSTON,  
First President of Texas,  
The "Lone Star" Republic**

James K. Polk, the Democratic candidate for the Presidency, won the election. A few weeks before he took the oath of office, Congress voted to admit Texas. President Tyler, on the last day of his term, sent a message to the Texans, inviting their "lone star" republic to become the twenty-eighth state of the Union. The war with Mexico came in the spring of 1846. President Polk sent United States troops to the Rio Grande to protect the United States claim that Texas extended to that river. The Mexicans insisted that the Nueces River, farther north, was the boundary line. The fighting began when a Mexican force crossed the Rio Grande. As soon as Congress received news of the skirmish, a formal declaration of war was voted. With war imminent, John C. Fremont's Third Expedition to explore and survey Mexican

territory, took on a military mission. He crossed the Sierras to Sutter's Fort, and in January of 1846, visited officials at Monterey. When asked to leave, Fremont refused, and made camp for his men armed with "guns, rifles, and pistols." Americans living north of San Francisco captured the town of Sonoma on June 14, 1846. They organized the "Republic" of California with a "Bear Flag." On July 7, 1846, after receiving news that war had been declared on Mexico, Commodore Sloat raised the flag of the United States at Monterey, and issued a proclamation declaring California annexed to the United States. Fremont arrived with his forces on July 19, and started south to join Kearny on his way from Ft. Leavenworth. Commodore Stockton appointed Fremont Governor of California, but his term lasted only about fifty days.

President Polk was anxious to send United States troops into California before winter set in and closed the trails through the mountains. Colonel Stephen W. Kearny, stationed at Fort Leavenworth, was made Commander of the West. Needing recruits quickly, Kearny dispatched Captain Allen to Iowa where bands of religious refugees were camped all the way across the state from Council Bluffs to the Missouri River.

Soon after the Mormon Church was organized by Joseph Smith in 1830, missionaries left the founder's home in Waterloo, New York to win converts on the frontier, preaching as they went. In a short time Joseph Smith and his followers were also on the way west to escape the opposition that developed against them in New York. The Mormons wandered to Kirtland, Ohio, to Jackson County, Missouri, and to Nauvoo, Illinois without

finding a congenial home among people friendly to Mormonism. When Joseph Smith was killed by an angry mob in Carthage, Illinois, Brigham Young succeeded him as president of the Mormon Church. The new leader held a council of his followers in Nauvoo. The Mormons decided to settle in the Far West beyond the Rocky Mountains where they could be alone and live in peace.

Their first wagon train crossed the Mississippi River early in February in 1846. Others followed day after day as families were ready to join the migration. It was a large undertaking to move between twelve and fifteen thousand people and about 30,000 head of live-stock. The refugees traveled in small companies and were scattered across Iowa. However, with snow, wind, and cold they did not leave that state until the following year.

On June 26, 1846 at Mount Pisgah near the Missouri River, Captain Allen read a circular explaining why Colonel Kearny was asking Mormons to enlist in the Army of the West to march into Mexican territory. Recruiting was encouraged by offering help in the westward migration. Allen stated:

This gives an opportunity of sending a portion of their young and intelligent men to the ultimate destination of their whole people, and entirely at the expense of the United States, and this advanced party can thus pave the way and look out the land for their brethren to come after them. Those of the Mormons who are desirous of serving their country, on the conditions here enumerated, are requested to meet me without delay at their principal camp at Council Bluffs, whither I am now going to consult with their principal men and to receive and organize the force contemplated to be raised.

I will receive all healthy, able-bodied men from 18 to 45 years of age.

Colonel Kearny asked for an enlistment of twelve months. He assured the Mormon recruits that they would be permitted to keep their guns and all other army equipment when their year of service was ended. At Council Bluffs Brigham Young advised young men to join the United States Army as their patriotic duty, although all hands were needed by the Mormons for the long trek westward. After a farewell dance on the open prairie, the Mormon battalion, numbering more than 500 men, marched away with Captain Allen to be outfitted at Fort Leavenworth for service in the Mexican War.

When the Mormon battalion arrived in Santa Fe, the soldiers found no war. The frontier town had surrendered to Kearny without firing a shot and he was on his way to the southern part of California. The Mormon battalion followed him. In the autumn of that same year Father De Smet, a missionary priest to Indian tribes in the Far West, stopped over at Council Bluffs on his way back to civilization. He wrote:

I found the advance guard of the Mormons, numbering about 10,000 camped in the territory of the Omahas, not far from the old Council Bluffs . . . They asked a thousand questions about the regions I had explored, and . . . the basin of the Great Salt Lake pleased them greatly from the account I gave of it.

Early in April of 1847 Brigham Young led his followers with a party of 143 picked men, three women and two children. He blazed the trail of the great migration by following the route of hunters and trappers along the Platte River. In this lead train were 72 wagons, 93 horses, 52 mules, 66 oxen, 19 cows, 17 dogs, and some chickens.

On a tributary of the Green River,

George Smith, a scout, was riding ahead when he chanced to meet the famed mountain man, Jim Bridger, who had discovered the Great Salt Lake. With two companions Bridger was on his way to Fort Laramie to get a supply of goods for his trading post. He talked with Young and other Mormon leaders and advised them not to settle in the arid region around the lake. Instead, he suggested the country along the Bear River.

Young still headed for the basin of the Salt Lake, stopping over for several days at Fort Bridger to mend wagons, rest the animals, and trade a little with the Shoshone Indians camping at Bridger's store in the western wilds. On July 12 the party crossed the Bear River. Although the banks of the stream were lined with willows, the water was clear, the grass was high, and strawberry vines grew wild, Brigham Young ordered the party to go on.

At the start of the migration in 1846 Brigham Young appointed William Clayton to keep a journal day by day. In this diary for Friday, July 23, 1847 Clayton wrote, after arriving in the Great Salt Lake basin:

The soil looks indeed rich, black and a little sandy. The grass is about four feet high and very thick on the ground and well mixed with rushes . . . . The brethren immediately rigged three plows and went to plowing a little northeast of camp; another party went with spades, etc., to make a dam on one of the creeks so as to throw the water at pleasure on the field, designing to irrigate the land in case rain should not come sufficiently.

During the Mexican War more families came over the Mormon Trail to settle in the basin and to make the desert bloom. There they plowed the fields and built homes while waiting for the return of the Mormon Battalion.

These soldiers in the United States Army learned about life in the desert during their march of 2000 miles from Santa Fe to San Diego. With heavy knapsacks on their backs, they often had to pull wagons with long ropes to help their mule teams go forward when the sand was deep. This march was a rehearsal for their new venture when they joined their families in the valley of the Great Salt Lake.

Meanwhile, emigrants were going to the Mormon settlement there. One company came from Liverpool, England. Before leaving Council Bluffs for the long trek across the plains, a leader advised the ladies not to wear their skirts so long, and to cover their heads with very large sunbonnets. For the men, he suggested heavy beards to protect their faces from the sun and wind of the prairie. His advice to all was to take only things needed on the road and for use when their journey ended.

When the pioneers arrived, they found a dry and treeless valley with mountains on the rim, and populated by jack rabbits and rattlesnakes. They unloaded hoes, rakes, plows, axes, and shovels and went to work to change the place. One of their first tasks was to dig ditches to bring water from the mountains. Every street in the new village had two of these ditches running the length of it, one on each side. This abundant water supply turned the desert green with crops. It was "the promised land."

A year later, after the first harvest, one settler wrote in a letter to his brother "back home" that he lived in a lonesome place and liked it. Scarcely any news reached his ears. He led a busy, happy, peaceful life. The drums beat for merry-making, not for a march to war. "How free from excitement we live!"





*Title Insurance and Trust Company, Los Angeles, California*

#### **BUFFALO IN THE FOOTHILL COUNTRY OF THE "GREAT AMERICAN DESERT"**

Old geographies labeled the dry area of the West, the "Great American Desert." Before entering this arid region, emigrants cut and dried grass and carried it on pack animals to feed their teams. Water was scarce, brackish with alkali, and hardly fit to drink. Yet, buffalo managed to survive.

The war with Mexico dragged on for nearly two years. The main battles were fought south of the Rio Grande where the Mexicans put up a strong defense. General Zachary Taylor invaded Mexico proper from the north. General Winfield Scott followed the route of Cortes from Vera Cruz to Mexico City.

The terms of peace were dictated by the victorious Anglo Americans. By the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, the United States gained territory west to the Pacific Ocean and south to the Rio Grande (except

the Gadsden Purchase). That area included the present states of New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, Nevada, California, and parts of Wyoming and Colorado. The United States agreed to pay all claims charged to the Mexican Government for damages to property of its citizens and to give Mexico \$15,000,000.

Polk missed the honor of annexing Texas. However, the people expected him to settle the Oregon question, and he did, but without a fight. In the uneven contest of trapper versus settler, the homebuilder

won. British statesmen realized that the country could not be held with a handful of traders after the plowmen had taken possession of the land. Great Britain proposed the same compromise, offered years before by John Quincy Adams, dividing the disputed territory on the forty-ninth parallel. The United States accepted it. By a treaty signed in June of 1846, the United States gained the present states of Idaho, Washington, and Oregon, and a coast line of 2730 miles along the Pacific Ocean.

The settlers who migrated from Europe to North America won the main continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific, not because they got there first, but because they plowed the ground, planted the crops, and lived on the farms. They loved the soil. To one of these "sod-eager" pioneers it was thrilling to crumble a clod of rich black earth in his strong brown hands and say to himself, "This is mine! ALL MINE!"

## AND THEN CAME GOLD!

IT HAPPENED ON Sutter's Ranch in California, nine days before the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the Mexican War. John Sutter, of Swiss origin, was tired of roaming and settled down to the easy-going life of a rancher on a 97,000 acre land grant from the Mexican Government, for which he pledged himself to protect the northern border of Mexico. Near the junction of the American and Sacramento Rivers, he built an adobe fort. It was armed with forty cannon which he had bought from the Russians when they abandoned Fort Ross north of San Francisco. Here the Swiss emigrant ruled over a little empire which he called New Helvetia, after the Roman name for his homeland. The world

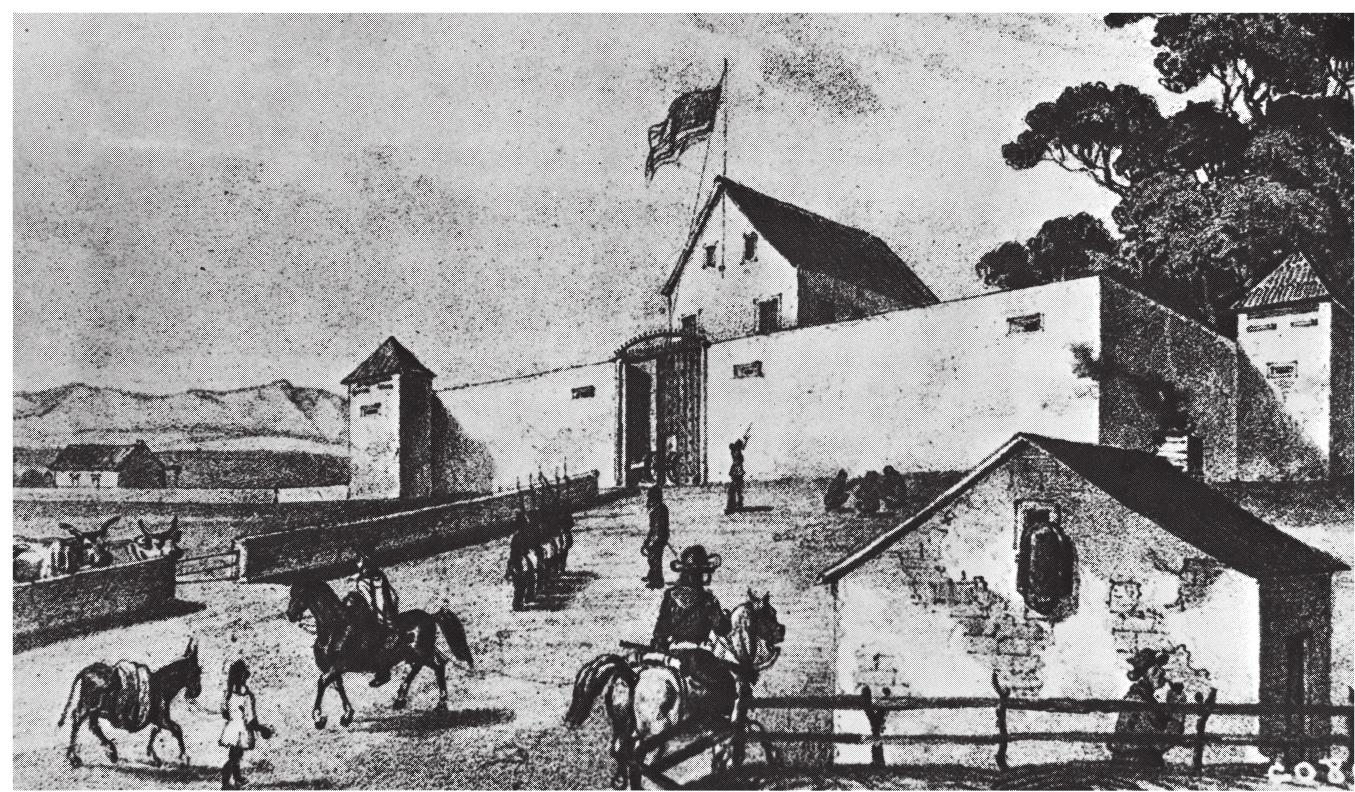
might never have heard of the globe-trotter, John Sutter, if he had not engaged John Marshall to work in his sawmill.

On Monday afternoon, the twenty-fourth of January in 1848, Marshall strolled down from the mill to the lower end of the tail race. There his eye caught the glitter of something bright in the crevice of a bare rock a few inches under water. He sent an Indian back to get a plate from his top sawyer, the man in the mill yard.

"What does Marshall want with a tin plate?" the man asked.

The Indian shook his head. He did not know. The workman jumped down from the saw-pit, went into his shack, and handed a plate to the Indian. That evening, Marshall came to the shanty and told two of the men to shut down the head gate in the morning and to throw in saw dust and rotten leaves to make it water-tight. These men had belonged to the Mormon battalion, mustered out at San Diego. They were working for Sutter while waiting for the snows to melt in the spring so they could cross the mountains to Utah, their new home. Bigler, one of them, wrote in his journal what happened on the next day:

The next morning we did as Marshall directed and while doing so, we saw him pass through the mill yard and go on down the race. We went in for breakfast and had scarcely commenced our day's work in the mill yard — I was busy preparing to put a blast of powder into a boulder that lay in the tail race near the utter wheel — when Marshall came carrying in his arms, his old slouch white hat. With a wise grin, he said "Boys, I believe I have found a gold mine," at the same time setting his hat on the work bench that stood in the mill yard. In an instant all hands gathered round, and sure enough, on the top of his hat crown, knocked in a little, lay the pure stuff — the most part of an ounce from the size of very small particles up to the size of a grain of wheat.



*California Historical Society, San Francisco*

#### FORT SUTTER ON THE SACRAMENTO RIVER

This fort was built in 1840 and 1841. The walls were adobe, 15 feet high and 2 feet thick. Walls were 4 feet thick in the towers at all four corners. Sutter's house inside was comfortable for those days.

In December of 1841, the Russian American Fur Company sold the properties at Bodega and Fort Ross, north of San Francisco, to John A. Sutter who transported the livestock and supplies to his large ranch in the Sacramento Valley. Sutter acquired 1700 oxen, cows and calves; nearly 1,000 horses and mules; 900 sheep; plows, rakes and carts for farming; and a number of boats. This sale removed from California the thirty-year-old foothold which Fort Ross gave Russia in Mexican territory.

Marshall asked his workmen to keep the secret until he could go on horseback to notify Sutter at the fort some miles away. Sutter returned with Marshall and the two men found flakes of gold all along the stream. Sutter dug a little nugget of the metal from a rock with only his pen knife for a tool. He shuddered at the thought of what would happen to his rancho if the news leaked out. Just then, one of his Indian laborers rushed up, shouting, "Oro! Oro!" and displayed a nugget nestling in

the palm of his hand. Some whispered and others shouted, "There's gold on the Sacramento!" The secret could not be kept. Sutter's business was ruined. His herders left their sheep and cattle unguarded in the pastures; his mill hands left bins of corn and wheat untouched; his workmen deserted and left tons of hides rotting in the vats of his tannery.

Then came the onrushing host of goldseekers from all over the world. They killed his cattle and sheep; dug up his



*California Historical Society, San Francisco*

#### COMPANIONS OF MARSHALL WHEN HE DISCOVERED GOLD

Henry Bigler wrote the journal of the discovery of gold on Sutter's Ranch. With him were Johnson, Smith, and Brown. The four men belonged to the Mormon Battalion in Kearny's army.

fields and pastures; and pitched their tents all over his rancho. Hundreds of American soldiers, mustered out of the army in California at the end of the Mexican War, spent their last pay for a pick, a shovel, a pan, a kettle, and flour for flapjacks. They were off to the gold fields. In May of 1848 a captain at the army base in San Francisco wrote:

Last night about 18 men deserted for the purpose of working in the gold mines — nine of them from my company.

The same captain, when mustered out, also went to dig for gold along the Sacramento. In October of the same year, an

army paymaster wrote to his chief in Washington from his headquarters in Monterey:

Nearly all of the men of company F, 3rd, artillery, have deserted. We have the *Ohio*, *Warren*, *Dale*, *Lexington*, and *Southampton* in port; but they cannot land a man, as they desert as soon as they set foot on shore.

Soldiers and sailors were not the only deserters. Tradesmen closed their shops and merchants locked their stores. "Gone to the Sacramento" became a familiar sign in the village of San Francisco. Disturbed by such wholesale desertion of army men, the War Department asked the first United

States governor of California to investigate and report on the gold rumors sweeping over the nation. He made a tour of the gold fields to see for himself. He reported:

A small gutter, not more than a hundred yards long by four feet wide and three feet deep, was pointed out to me as the one where two men had obtained \$17,000 in gold. These men employed four white men and about a hundred Indians. At the end of one week, after paying the workers' wages, the two men had left \$10,000 in gold.

The news of gold in California flashed around the world with amazing speed. Guidebooks with advice to emigrants

flowed from the presses in the United States and Europe. They were quickly sold to eager buyers. In one of these, published in New York, a steamship company advertised fares from New York to San Francisco around Cape Horn for \$350, the time, 130 days. However, the voyage around Cape Horn usually took a longer time because the overcrowded vessels were often delayed for repairs. A dealer advised emigrants to take along a supply of his pickles and sauerkraut to prevent scurvy on the long sea voyage. Another firm guaranteed that its hard ship bread would not mould in the damp sea air. Many voyages were made during the

#### CALIFORNIA GOLD DIGGERS

In this sketch of mining life during the gold rush, some men are panning for gold in a mountain stream. Others are digging into the river bank in the narrow canyon. A sentence in the "Miner's Creed" relates the hardships of a gold digger, with a bit of humor:

A miner believes in big vegetables, because he sees them; but wonders if there is any other kind of fruit than dried apples, dried apples scalded, and dried apples with the strings left in.

*California Historical Society, San Francisco*



winter of 1848, when it was summer south of the equator.

Emigrants from the Gulf States, and others in a hurry, crossed the fever-ridden isthmus of Panama. They traveled the Gulf in Indian canoes paddled by the natives. They went over the narrow mountain trails on the backs of surefooted burros. From Panama to San Francisco, a steamship line advertised fares of \$250 for a trip of twenty days. The great land migration had to wait until the summer of 1849. Many of the covered-wagon emigrants were hardy western pioneers whose forefathers had rolled the frontier back over the first mountain barrier to the Mississippi River.

When pleasant camping grounds were found, with spring water and good grass, the caravans sometimes rested on a Sunday. Amid the rub-a-dub of washboards and the clang of the wagon-mender's hammer, the people managed to listen to a sermon preached by a minister standing in the center of the wagon corral. One caravan celebrated the Fourth of July in 1849 on the western prairie. A woman wrote in her diary:

After dinner we decided to celebrate. We sang patriotic songs, repeated what we could remember of the Declaration of Independence, fired a few guns, and gave three cheers for the United States and California, and danced until midnight to the music of a violin and Jew's harp. Indians came and looked on mystified at the dances of the pale faces.

After crossing the Rockies through South Pass the real hardships began. The emigrants could make some preparation for this part of the journey at Salt Lake. From the Mormons in the Salt Lake Valley, they were able to buy some supplies.

Brigham Young had refused to join the gold rush. When the gold-seekers passed through his settlement, the Mormons had corn meal to sell them at \$60 per hundred pounds. One forty-niner traded a horse, for which he had paid \$110, to a Mormon farmer for a hundred pounds of flour. One emigrant chanced upon a fur trader who sold him five tin cups of flour for \$5.

In spite of this brief respite, many of these travelers did not reach the coast. Water and grass were scarce, teams died from exhaustion and hunger, and wagons with their contents were abandoned on the trail. One man wrote in his journal, "Counted 46 dead oxen in today's march." The suffering was greatest in the long stretch of desert country between Salt Lake and the Sierras in California. When the people living in California heard of the sufferings of emigrants stranded in the Sierras, they collected money to buy food, medicine, clothing, and horses and mules to bring them down from the mountains. Small children were carried in deep leather pockets dangling from pack saddles. Their tousled heads bobbed up and down with every step of the steeds. John Sutter donated flour from his mill, stock from his range, and cowboys from his ranch. No one man rescued as many emigrants as did Sutter, who lost all he had in the gold rush and died a poor man.

Who joined the gold rush? Gold was discovered in California during a period of hard times. Men who had failed in business and farmers who could not pay off the mortgages on their land, made up a good part of the forty-niners golden fleece. To them, mining \$10,000 in one week was a tale of magic. On the Sacramento, perhaps, they could find enough gold to pay their debts and then start all over



*Title Insurance and Trust Company, Los Angeles*

#### A PROSPECTOR OF THE GOLDRUSH DAYS

The prospector founded the mining industry of the West. With burros hauling mining equipment, he tracked across deserts, climbed over mountains, and waded in streams. His first bag of gold dust paid for a "cradle," like the one on the burro's back. With this rocking device, he could wash more gravel and find more gold nuggets between sunrise and sunset than with a pick and pan. If he found little on some days, he was content. His needs were few, his hopes were high, and the gamble was thrilling.

again. A famine in Ireland in 1846 and a revolution in Germany in 1848 brought thousands from these countries.

Among the citizens of San Francisco, five years after the gold rush of '49, were merchants from New York, a farmer from Pennsylvania, a ship captain from Massachusetts, a gold miner from Vermont, a sheriff from Missouri, and a minister from Kentucky. The German immigrants, the largest number from any foreign country, were butchers, bakers, brewers, cabinet makers, jewelers, engravers, and musicians. Among the French, the next largest number from a foreign

land, were a sculptor, an actor, a book-binder, an artist, a gardener, a watchmaker, a restaurant keeper, a baker, a cook, a florist, and a hairdresser. A language teacher from Mexico, a stock dealer from Chile, a cook from Hungary, a peddler from Poland, a tailor from Switzerland, a mariner from Norway, a sailor from Denmark, a sea captain from England, a policeman from Scotland, and a cook from China made their homes in San Francisco. The population of this village grew from 2,000 to 20,000 in a single year.

It was not enough to "live and let live." To survive the slogan had to be "live and

HELP live.” People recognized the needs of fellow pioneers because those needs were the same as their own. This awareness erased lines of class distinction and developed a new social consciousness. People began to feel that it was their duty to share their freedom and opportunity with their fellow men. Again, “something new” took root in the New World.

## WAGON WHEEL GOVERNMENT

WHEN EMIGRANTS crossed the Mississippi River to pass through unsettled country, they left the law of the land behind them. Each caravan was an independent community, a little nation in itself. Success or failure depended upon its citizens.

When enough wagons had arrived to make a train large enough to venture across the plains, a bugle call summoned all the men to a meeting where laws were drawn up to govern the caravan enroute. Although these rules were as varied as the men who made them, the regulations for safety were much the same. The most dreaded chore was guard duty at night. The men stood two, three, or four hour vigils from which no man was excused except for serious illness. Watching alone on dark nights with only the stars for light, what did men think about? One wrote in his diary:

Was on guard last night. The endearments of my home and family and friends occupied my thoughts nearly all the time. Ah! It is a hard fate to be thus separated from all that is dear to one on earth. And why? For the purpose of making a sudden fortune, all is forsaken in the beloved land of our fathers, — thousands upon thousands rushing over to the land of gold. — Doubtless every soul now traveling expects to realize his ten thousand ere he returns. But alas! The tale is yet to be told.

Even the stoutest hearts grew homesick on the journey. This created a problem for the leader who shouldered the responsibility of getting the train to its destination. After the rules were voted upon and a majority agreed, the leader was chosen. The job was an honor, without pay. When several men were nominated, the emigrants sometimes voted by standing in a line behind their choice. The candidate with the longest line won the election. Ever after, he was called captain, major, colonel, or some other military title that clung to him all of his life.

Although the people in a wagon train agreed to obey the rules, they did not always live up to their promises. The troubles of the journey were often too much to endure with patience. An ox died; a horse was stolen; a wagon broke down. The prairie wind seared their faces; the pelting hail tore holes in the wagon tops; the mountain cloudbursts flooded the streams. Men grew irritable and despondent and quarreled among themselves. Sometimes, in a sudden fit of anger, one emigrant killed another. Along the trail were graves with markers like the following:

Sam'l A. Fitzsimmons died from effects of a wound received from a bowie-knife in the hands of Geo. Symington, Aug. 25, 1849.

In case of murder or any crime the men of the train elected a judge and a jury to try the accused. Each evening, after a day's travel, the trial proceeded with witnesses testifying, lawyers arguing, a jury listening, a judge presiding. If guilty, the man was held as a prisoner and turned over to the first sheriff they met. If the jury agreed that the murder was in self-defense, the prisoner was freed. No court



of law reversed the decision of a wagon train judge and jury. As hardships increased, men and women lost their tempers over trivial matters. A successful captain of an overland caravan was really a leader of men.

A little calf, born on the journey, became the pet of one particular wagon train. When his feet got sore from walking over the rough ground, an emigrant bought a buffalo hide from an Indian and made shoes for the animal. The calf looked very funny capering over the prairie in his seven-league boots. He needed them. He was bound for Oregon, a long way off. One night a wolf attacked the calf and mangled it badly before a guard could rescue it. Some argued that the animal should be killed to end its suffering. Others objected to killing their pet. Finally, a man shot it. Feelings ran high and the emigrants took sides, refusing to speak to each other. The wise leader stopped the train one noon hour, declaring the party could not go on with such ill feeling. He asked the men to sit down together, talk things over, and settle their differences, for the common good. They did and the wagon train went on.

When the caravans reached their destination, mining camps grew into towns almost over night. Citizens formed committees to keep order until elections could be held and laws passed. In San Francisco in 1849 such a committee sentenced several young rioters to terms in jail but they went free. There was not a jail in the whole territory of California.

In the wagon trains were men from all walks of life. Southern gentlemen left cotton fields behind, took along a few slaves, and started west to dig for gold along the Sacramento. On the prairie where

every man did his share or was left behind, the landed aristocrat and day laborer rode side by side. In the "diggings" the college graduate from eastern states and the raw frontiersman who could neither read nor write panned for gold in the same streams, bunked in the same shack, and cooked over the same fire. The rich and poor of this country shared the discomforts of a miner's life with immigrants from Europe, Asia, and South America.

This frontier friendliness born of necessity, seeped into all phases of American life. It inspired a new sense of social justice. People began to question, to criticize, to demand.

## CHANGES IN THE WAY OF LIVING

BY 1830, ALTHOUGH THE nation was still agricultural, people began to realize that an industrial era was dawning and that it was necessary to adjust to it. People began to think differently. When a family worked at home, parents and children toiled long hours, often from daylight to dark. They did not complain because they were working in their own little business. When industry moved from the home to the mill, everyone went with it, including the children as young as ten years of age. However, when they worked for wages instead of profits, they began to complain about the long hours of labor. Agitation began for a ten-hour day. To win it, workingmen joined trade societies or unions, sent petitions to state legislatures, called strikes, operated community shops, and started a political party. When people began to feel that the way of working on a farm and living in the country was not successful when applied to working in a

factory and living in a city, they began to experiment. They sought a new life-pattern to fit their new way of earning through wages.

The thirty years preceding the War Between the States was a heyday for reformers with many ideas for adjusting society to an industrial era. Some ideas were practical and succeeded; some were impractical and failed. Most people agreed that young children should not work in the mills. The first laws forbidding or limiting child labor were passed. A group of manufacturers met and voluntarily agreed not to hire anyone under twelve years of age. Better working conditions, shorter hours, and higher wages became the goal of labor reformers. Progress was slow because working conditions were so much better in the United States than in Europe at the time.

About forty experiments were tried of living in groups where each man worked for the benefit of the community and not for his own personal profit. The first of these was established at New Harmony, Indiana by Robert Owen, a wealthy Scots manufacturer. On the Brook Farm near Boston, another group tried living on a dairy farm where men worked for the community without private profit. In a free country where every man with a spark of ambition could get ahead and possibly earn a fortune, these socialistic schemes failed, one after another.

In the age of social reform, the temperance movement became a great crusade, supported by churches of all denominations. In an address to the Boston Young Men's Total Abstinence Society in November of 1846, the minister of Federal Street Church said:

Young men of America! The future history of this republic must be determined by you. — A

people among whom intemperance prevails can never accomplish an honorable destiny. Freedom is but an empty word where virtue is lost. Hear ye then the appeal which is made to you in the name of your country and all that you love within its borders. Patriotism calls to you from its fields of toil and its altars of sacrifice. Humanity waits for your decision. The hope of the world looks imploringly to you. Young men! Do your duty.

Dorothea Dix exposed the inhuman treatment of insane persons, many of whom were chained in the cells of city and county jails. She campaigned for real hospitals where those suffering from mental illness could have proper medical care and a chance to recover.

Some states passed laws to improve prisons and to outlaw imprisonment for debt. The first Women's Rights Convention met in Seneca Falls, New York, where a movement was organized to demand property rights for women, permission to vote and hold office, and equality with men before the law. More states gave men who did not own property the right to vote. It was a struggle to accomplish this, especially in Rhode Island where the property question almost caused a civil war. For nearly two hundred years no one had been allowed to vote for town or state officers unless he had property and was a freeman of the town in which he resided. Since the Statute of 1723, no person could be a freeman unless he owned a freehold estate of the value fixed by law or was the eldest son of such a freeholder. Under these antiquated laws thousands of men who worked for wages in mills and factories were denied the right to vote. There was trouble when property owners voted down their request for suffrage. Before 1850 nearly all men could vote. Women did not gain national suffrage until 1920.

Few of the crusades starting in the 1830's and 1840's accomplished as much as did the reforms in education. The idea of public schools took root in Massachusetts. In 1647 the colony passed a law that every town of fifty householders must hire a person to teach reading and writing to the children who came and asked to learn. Nearly two hundred years later Massachusetts took the lead again when Horace Mann, a young Bostonian lawyer, was appointed secretary of the first State Board of Education. Although Massachusetts had passed a law establishing public high schools ten years before Horace Mann was appointed, there were only about a dozen in the entire state. Yet, Massachusetts had more than any other state. Addressing a group of honor students at Harvard University in 1850, a speaker made this remark:

If there be any single trait by which the historian will distinguish the present from all past ages, it is the rage for *reform*. It agitates every nation and all classes; and it comprehends nearly every subject of thought and action. Everywhere on every matter, and in all ways, the great heart of humanity throbs for reform.

Class distinctions had little chance to rise on a fast-moving frontier where rich and poor shared alike in the struggle for food, shelter, and comforts in an undeveloped country. The labor system in the South came under attack from all sides during this age of reform and reformers. Slavery became the burning question of the day.

**MAPS:**

WA16r WA21r WA19r  
*Atlas of American History* by Edgar B. Wesley

---