

## EDWARD KEMBLE

1847-48

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The months following the Mexican War brought many changes to Spanish-speaking Californians' way of life. Soldiers returned to their homes to discover their livestock stolen, fences destroyed, and crops trampled. In Sonoma, Mariano Vallejo estimated the Americans had inflicted more than \$100,000 in damages to his *rancho* and half that to his brother's. Ex-governor Alvarado had to sell his *rancho* in present-day Mariposa County to Frémont to pay off war debts. For the most part, Californios gamely tried to resume life as it had been under Mexico's ambivalent watch. Vallejo went so far as to shave off his beard, Yankee-style, and march in a victory parade at Portsmouth Square in Yerba Buena (recently renamed San Francisco).

San Francisco grew by leaps and bounds after the American conquest, soon replacing Monterey as the coast's main port. (It helped that ships could now unload their cargoes directly onto a dock instead of having to ferry goods by rowboat onto shore.) Real estate sold briskly, and hotels, houses, and businesses were erected at a rapid rate. "The little village...is fast becoming a town of importance," remarked Bryant when he returned in February 1847. "There is a prevailing air of activity, enterprise, and energy; and the men, in view of the advantageous position of the town for commerce, are

making large calculations upon the future; calculations I believe will be fully realized.”

The population of the town had unexpectedly tripled the previous summer when Samuel Brannan arrived with 238 Mormons onboard the *Brooklyn*. Brannan, born in Maine, had converted to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in his early twenties and edited a New York City Mormon newspaper. To escape persecution, Mormon leader Brigham Young decided to move the church headquarters from Illinois to Utah in 1845, envisioning a Mormon nation in the west. Brannan was selected to lead a party of East Coast Mormons around Cape Horn to establish a colony in California. Much to his dismay, when the *Brooklyn* arrived at San Francisco Bay on July 31, 1846, it anchored alongside the U.S.S. *Portsmouth*. The U.S. Navy had beaten them there.

An opportunistic risk-taker and—despite religious proscription—a heavy drinker, Brannan began using Mormon tithes to launch a variety of personal business investments, including opening a general store at Sutter’s Fort, buying up huge tracts of real estate, and founding California’s first flour mill and San Francisco’s first newspaper. The Mormon Church charged him with embezzlement in one of the first jury trials in California, but disagreements among the jurors gave Brannan his freedom. He continued to improperly collect and use Mormon funds until the church excommunicated him.

Edward Cleveland Kemble was one of the few non-Mormons to sail with Brannan on the *Brooklyn*. He was born in Troy, New York, in 1828, the son of John Kemble, editor and owner of the *Troy Northern Budget*, and Mary Ann Whipple, whose grandfather William fought with George Washington and signed the Declaration of Independence. As a teenager Edward worked as an apprentice in the print shop of Sam Brannan’s newspaper, *The Prophet*. He was awed by Brannan, only ten years older, who ran his own newspaper, corresponded with Brigham Young, and preached every Sunday to captivated New York audiences. When Kemble was nineteen, Brannan invited him to come along to California. Kemble, who had

gobbled up western literature by Dana, Hastings, and Frémont, jumped at the chance to see the frontier for himself.

Once in California, Kemble—like Byant—volunteered to fight with the U.S. Army. After participating in the Battle of Natividad in San José, he got a chance to meet his hero Frémont and ride with him into battle in southern California. After the war, Kemble returned to San Francisco and was placed in charge of Brannan’s newly founded weekly paper, the *California Star*. Under his editorship, the *Star* merged with *The Californian* and eventually became the *Alta California*, San Francisco’s first daily paper.

On January 24, 1848, an American carpenter named James Marshall noticed some glittering particles in a tailrace of a sawmill he was constructing for John Sutter on the south fork of the American River. Curious, he rode down to New Helvetia and showed the particles to Sutter, who cracked open his copy of *Encyclopedia Americana* to the entry on gold. He tested Marshall’s samples and declared them to be “gold of the finest quality, at least twenty-three carats.” Afraid the discovery would delay the construction of his sawmill, Sutter swore everyone in the room to secrecy, but word still spread. Sutter himself not only told governor Richard B. Mason the news but sent along six ounces of gold to substantiate it. Rumors spread to San Francisco, and Kemble traveled to Sutter’s Mill to investigate, hoping for a small article for the next edition of the *California Star*. When he arrived he took one look at the rustic mill and its “churlish and inhospitable” crew before scrawling a disbelieving “humbug!” across his notepad.

But the rumors persisted. Sutter’s workers began buying liquor with gold dust at Brannan’s general store, and the Mormon, sensing an opportunity, quietly stocked his store with picks, pans, shovels, and other equipment likely to soon be in high demand. On May 22 Brannan marched through downtown San Francisco waving his hat in one hand and a bottle of gold dust in the other, hollering, “Gold! Gold! Gold from the American River!” Within a month every town in California was virtually deserted, and a worldwide rush for California gold had begun.

Even skeptical Kemble felt the grip of gold fever. He suspended publication of the *California Star* on June 14 and headed for the gold fields. Like virtually every other miner, Kemble found that gold mining was a dirty, back-breaking business with little reward and quit soon enough. He went on to become one of the most prominent newspapermen in California, writing for several papers in San Francisco and Sacramento. He compiled an extensive "History of California Newspapers" in 1858, an invaluable record of early California journalism. In March 1873, thirteen years before his death, Kemble assembled a series of articles for the *Sacramento Daily Union* outlining his experiences in early California. Written with the wisdom of hindsight, to be sure, they furnish a vivid picture of California on the eve of the gold rush—by now a thoroughly American land.

*Reminiscences of early San Francisco*

The population of San Francisco, at the period of which we write [spring 1847], was a little less than 500 natives (or Californians proper) and "foreigners," as Americans, Englishmen, Kanakas, and other outsiders were called.

The war for the acquisition of California by the dominant party of these foreigners was over [January 13, 1847], and our flag was flung from Sutter's Fort to San Diego. Fremont's battalion had been disbanded at Los Angeles, and the settlers, hunters, newly-arrived emigrants, runaway sailors, Mormons, and Indians, who had composed the Pathfinder's army, were on their way to their several homes in the north. Among them was the writer of these sketches, a long-haired youth, clad in uniform of the battalion—a sailor's shirt with a star in each corner of the broad collar, fringed buckskin trousers, Mexican *sombrero* (without the glazed covering), and buckskin moccasins. He had sold in Los Angeles, for 75 cents on the dollar, the scrip in which he had been paid for his five months service [thirty-five dollars, plus six dollars allowance, per month]; bought four good horses at five dollars to eight dollars each; and in company with three other members of the battalion, leisurely retraced the late wearisome line of march, not now through desolate, rainy regions, but under the matchless skies of an early California spring, fetlock-deep in tender grass and brilliant flowers. Riding gaily along by day and camping wherever the night overtook them, feasting high on flour slapjacks and boiled jerked-beef, they



Edward Cleveland Kemble (1828–1886), left, with his *Alta California* co-editor, Edward C. Gilbert. *Courtesy of the California Historical Society, FN-16641.*

forgot the miseries of their late fruitless marches and in a week rejoined their friends in the new San Francisco.

I shall not easily forget the changed aspect of the place under the stimulus which the occupation of California by American forces

had imparted. Stevenson's Regiment<sup>1</sup> had arrived, and one company was quartered in the old *adobe* custom-house on Portsmouth Square, where I had last seen the marines of the *Portsmouth* sloop-of-war, the original garrison which hoisted the flag on the pole in front of the house. It was early evening as we entered the town by the old mission road—a three-mile stretch of deep sand. Lights gleamed on shore and shipboard, fifty for one that we had been accustomed to see when martial law was first proclaimed in the little quiet *pueblo* the summer before. Drinking-houses were in full blast; the sounds of a fiddle and the unmistakable strains of the "Arkansaw Traveler" came from a saloon situated near the road; the Leidesdorff House, or City Hotel, was brilliantly lighted and thronged with strangers and officers in strange uniforms; and above the hum of voices and loud laughter, as we rode by the long porch, arose the clink of glasses and the click of the billiard balls.... The clearly recognizable voice of a New York short-boy bawled out to us—"Hey! Two-forty on the Bloomingdale Road! Where yer goin' with them crabs—sa-ay?"

It was a novel sensation to sleep under a roof that night, and a grand exhilaration the next morning to climb to the top of Telegraph Hill and look down upon this great city of half a thousand inhabitants with its 150 *adobe* and frame houses, its two hotels and

<sup>1</sup>The First Regiment of New York Volunteers, commanded by Jonathan D. Stevenson, was a motley group of 917 New York City farmers, mechanics, artisans, and petty criminals. These self-proclaimed adventurers agreed to fight Mexicans in exchange for free passage to California, but by the time they arrived in the spring of 1847, the war was over. During the gold rush, several men from Stevenson's Regiment formed the Regulators (commonly called the Hounds), a brutal vigilante group who "hounded" Hispanic San Franciscans out of town. Other members of Stevenson's Regiment went on to become prominent Californians, including John B. Frisbie (secretary of the Constitutional Convention of 1849), Rev. Thaddeus Leavenworth (*alcalde* of San Francisco in 1848 and 1849), Dr. Felix Wierzbicki (author of the first English-language book published in California), and San Francisco newspapermen Edward G. Buffum and Edward C. Gilbert.

five or six stores, and its busy waterfront (Montgomery Street), which was then, as for years afterward, the combined Broadway, Wall, and Water Street of San Francisco. I remember scanning the crescent-shaped shore, from the north side of the hill on which I stood to Rincon Point, and wondering if the time would ever come when this indentation would be filled in by the city's growth and the line of the city front extended straight across from Telegraph Hill to Rincon Point.

The great event of that spring was the sale of the beach and water lots, great chiefly as the forerunner of great things and the dispenser of great fortunes to a favored few. To a large majority of the townspeople, it was an occasion of no special interest; to a few (it was whispered at the time, a secret conclave, or, as it would be termed now, a ring) the sale afforded the opportunity for a grand speculation. The property was sold by order of General [Stephen Watts] Kearny at a public auction. The *alcalde* of the town<sup>2</sup> was a young purser's clerk, or other civilian employed in the Navy, who had recently been appointed to the important office of Chief Magistrate, and who seems at the outset to have fallen into the hands of a worse company than ever infested the road to Jericho in the days when the good Samaritan went traveling that way....

The beach and water lots were sold at an auction on the 20th day of June—knocked off by a sprightly little fellow whom the *alcalde* had appointed sheriff—and the knot of buyers, twenty or thirty in number, was made up of merchants, Army and Navy officers (buying, of course, by proxy), and speculators who had just come out. For a few hundred dollars men bought real estate on which they realized two or three years afterwards as many hundreds of thousands of dollars. The terms of sale (only half complied with

<sup>2</sup>In the spring of 1847, San Francisco's *alcalde* was Philadelphia-born lawyer George Hyde (1819–1890).

as to the cash payments) was one-fourth of the money at day of sale and balance in six, twelve, and eighteen months....

In the month of August of this year, Edward Gilbert, then a lieutenant in Stevenson's regiment, took the first "census" of San Francisco. The actual population of the place was reported to be 459—of this number 273 could read and write. The number of tenements of all descriptions composing the town was 157, an increase of 100 percent in five months.

San Francisco was at this time a city without churches or religious institutions of any kind except a Sunday school commenced in the spring by some pious members of Stevenson's regiment. There was, of course, the regular service of the Roman Catholic Church at Mission Dolores and an occasional visit from one of the chaplains of the men of war on the coast; but even the Mormons who came around in the ship *Brooklyn* yielded to the sense of separation and complete isolation from religious influences that infected the entire community, and seemed to forget when Sunday came about. The first effort to plant a Protestant church was made in the interests of the Episcopal body by a man who afterwards proved to be a sheep of a particularly dark fleece. This fellow [Thaddeus Leavenworth] subsequently became *alcalde* and protracted the reign of injustice and corruption in that office far into the succeeding year. As an illustration of the ungodliness of the times, it may be mentioned that the anniversary of our national independence, occurring this year on Sunday, was celebrated by dinners, speeches, and balls on the Christian Sabbath, and, most remarkable of all, no one seemed to think such an observance of the day at all questionable....

The ships of war, departing from the harbor at the approach of winter, withdrew the sailor element of the population, which occasionally disturbed the quiet of the place, but at the same time deprived society of some of its leaders and ornaments in the persons of the gay, young officers. While the war vessels lay in port, dinners



"San Francisco in 1847," 1847, by William Rich Hutton. *Courtesy of The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.*

and balls, on ship and on shore, supplied a lively round of pleasure. In their absence the Spanish *fandangos* were revived and became the chief amusement of the town. An occasional horse race varied the sport. Excursions and horseback rides to different parts of the peninsula on which San Francisco stands were frequent. Little trips by sailing vessels (launches) to attractive points on the bay or up the Sacramento gave change of life and scene to the town-wearied. The ranches dotting the valleys lateral to the bay, and still in the hands of their original California owners, were always open and abounding in hospitality. Picnics to Fort Point, mussel-roasting on the shores of the bay, strawberry parties on the cliffs beyond the *presidio*, and visits to the sea lions made up the daily life of the pleasure-seeker in San Francisco in the spring and fall of 1847.

The overland immigration of that year added half a dozen families to the population, and a few pleasant people found their way over from the Sandwich Islands and China. A notable event was the arrival of a shipload of goods selected in New York City with reference to the improved state of the California market (now

largely influenced by American tastes and customs) and the opening of a "New York store." Two or three other mercantile houses were set up this fall. The two weekly newspapers varied their contents with accounts of General [Winfield] Scott's battles in Mexico—ninety days old—and late and important intelligence from the States—four to five months on its way. The staple fare of the newspapers, however, was the local broils, *alcalde* battles, editorial personalities, and arrivals and departures of shipping.

The rainy season set in early, but the storms were not severe. The war for the conquest of California was at an end, and peace and good order reigned throughout the length and breadth of the Territory. Frémont was on his way to the States, under arrest by General Kearny for disobedience of orders.<sup>3</sup> The disbanded volunteers were either settled upon farms or looking out for speculative openings, such as new town and mill sites afforded. Throughout the northern valleys, thinly settled as they were, we heard of preparations for farming on a scale never before attempted in California. A considerable emigration came through from Oregon and took up claims. The hope of the country lay in the direction of agriculture, and every encouragement was given by merchants and through the country press to plant largely. American plows were breaking the virgin soil in all the choice farming localities about the bay and along the rivers. Few thought of harvests in connection with the hard and dry soil of the open plains through which our two chief rivers coursed. Wheat along the alluvial bottoms and wheat in the little garden spots up the rich valleys north of San Francisco was the limit of our first venture of agricultural faith. Fruit—except the Mission

<sup>3</sup>Hero though he was, Charles C. Frémont overstepped his authority in the waning months of the Mexican War, and General Kearny ordered him back to Washington, D.C., for trial. In January 1848 Frémont was found guilty of disobedience of orders, but he proudly returned to California, where he was elected one of the state's first two senators.

grapes and pears—and vegetables—except beans, peas, and a few potatoes—it had not entered into the mind of the California farmer to attempt to cultivate. I remember an Army officer of high standing in San Francisco, a gentleman of rare intelligence and ripe judgment, gave me a paragraph about peaches, clipped from a New Jersey paper, to which he had appended some remarks. The item showed the profits that the Reybolds had realized from the sale of their large crop of peaches. The comment of the officer was: “Similar paragraphs will someday be written of the productiveness of California in this fruit.” I am not aware that a peach had ever been raised in the country up to that time.

The new year, which was danced in with *fandangos* and wet with libations of crusty old port of native manufacture (our later vintage has not produced the port wines of such acceptable flavor as the cellars of old “Don Luís” of Los Angeles<sup>4</sup> held in store at that day), beheld new and more startling changes in the aspect of affairs throughout the northern region than any we have yet described.... The air was full of rumors of rich mineral deposits having been found in different parts of the country. Prospecting parties were out in every direction, and claims were being “denounced for quicksilver” in a dozen different places. No one as yet talked of gold. Silver was the limit of conjecture and speculation. Iron and copper were suspected, and tin and black lead reported. As early as January, the mineral quest began.

I remember visiting the redwoods near Bodega with a party of wood choppers, most of them Mormons from the *Brooklyn* colony, and sitting by the evening campfire when all the conversation was about the chances of precious metals being found in the hills. One of the party had brought into camp a small boulder to which bits

<sup>4</sup>Juan Luís Vignes (ca. 1779–1862)—born Jean Louis in his native Bordeaux, France—emigrated to California in the early 1830s and utilized his training as a wine maker to establish a famous vineyard in southern California.

of shining mica adhered. He said that down in Georgia, where he once lived, they would have “allowed” that such a rock was a sign of gold. Another said it was more like a lead sign, or what they used to call “galena” out West. The editor of the *Star*, who made a trip up the Sonoma and Napa valleys, returned with a pocket full of specimens of minerals...which furnished matter for profoundly stupid editorials for several weeks. Men traveled through the country with hammers in their pockets with which to break off fragments of boulders and suspicious-looking stones. Riding along the road up the American forks in company with an old Californian friend, he was continually leaving my side to try his hammer and his metallurgic tests on the wayside rocks. The country was going mineral-mad without any apparent cause. No valuable mines had been discovered except those at New Almaden.<sup>5</sup> But everybody believed in the existence of great wealth; no one could say of what. Silver and quicksilver were prognosticated; gold was written in no man’s prophesyings.

Late in February a special publication was prepared at the *Star* office, to send overland to meet the spring emigration of that year from the East, and for circulation in the States. It was such a sheet as was made up in aftertimes at all the California newspaper offices, and called the “Steamer Papers,” filled with mining intelligence and murders, for the edification of our Eastern friends and the depreciation of California morals in the markets of the old world. The *Star*’s special [April 1, 1848] set a good example, which was unworthily followed. It was filled to overflowing—four pages and a supplement—with interesting and generally correct accounts of California, her “resources and prospects.” Her agricultural advantages

<sup>5</sup>Miners had been harvesting mercury from the mines at New Almaden (located south of San José) since 1845. Mercury, useful for separating gold flakes from dirt, became extraordinarily valuable during the gold rush, and New Almaden produced about \$1 million worth annually.

formed the chief theme; her grazing and sheep-raising and wine-making opportunities were next presented; her manufacturing facilities were stated; and lastly her mineral attractions were modestly set forth. Several thousand copies of this publication were sent over the mountains by special courier.

I was standing in Howard & Mellus' store, on Montgomery Street, near what is now Commercial Street, one day in March of this year, watching Sutter's launch, *Sacramento*, with its crew of Kanakas and Digger Indians, maneuver against an ebb tide to make her landing off the foot of Clay Street, about a stone's throw from the beach at Montgomery Street, and wondering if the two or three anxious-looking passengers in the stern were acquaintances, when the clerk of the store, who had been also watching the little schooner-rigged vessel, quietly remarked, "I suppose we shall hear if that story is true about the gold mine up the American."

I have already said that the upper country had "turned loose" this spring to hunt for silver, quicksilver, coal, iron, copper, sulfur, saltpeter, salt, black lead, and in short, everything but gold (not excepting diamonds, which were reported to have been discovered in the Sonoma Valley), and that paragraphs in the two local papers about new mineral developments were beginning to grow stale and unprofitable. I was hoping for an item from the *Sacramento* to vary this monotony, and in the mind's eye of a printer had measured the chances for about a "stick-full of matter" needed to fill up the closing column and send the weekly *Star* to press. There had been woven into the dull gossip of the town that week a tiny thread of gold, caught from a rumor that floated like a gossamer down from the upper country, but it was too thin and insubstantial to make any sort of figure in the pattern, and had been rejected from the news material with which the *Star* looms with lofty discrimination supplied the market. Some native Californian, it was said, one of those

hard riders who were continually posting about the country on their fast horses, had ridden across from Sutter's *embarcadero*, through the "tule cut-off," to the ranches back of Benicia, and thence, crossing Carquinez Straits, had come through Livermore's Pass to San José and San Francisco—all in two days from the point of starting (opposite the present site of Sacramento)—and he had brought a report that some of Captain Sutter's men had found gold on the American Fork.

So, when Howard & Mellus' clerk suggested that the launch *Sacramento* might bring further tidings about the gold mine up the American, the editor of the *Star* hoped it might bring an item about the number of acres Captain Sutter would sow in wheat this spring, and thus foreshadow a more certain golden harvest in the fall.

The passengers by the *Sacramento*—only four days from Sutter's Fort—were strangers, and when they stepped ashore one of them asked where Captain Vioget<sup>6</sup> lived, and being shown made haste in that direction, leaving the *Star* reporter to interview the others. They didn't know anything of Captain Sutter's sowing, or how many hides he would send down, or whether any parties were rendezvousing at the fort for a start across the plains, or whether the prospects of an emigration from Oregon of the dissatisfied last year's comers was as reported, or what was what, or which was which, for any practical purpose that the *Star* editor plied his questions. The chances of the "stick-full of matter" began to diminish to a bare possibility of a line or two, when one of them said if we would "come up to the store" he would show us something.

And back to the store we all went. It is the strangest thing that I cannot remember this man's name. He had been in the employ of Captain Sutter, but had come down on business of his own. He was

<sup>6</sup> Jean Jacques Vioget (1799-1855), a Swiss-born soldier, engineer, and artist who served in Napoleon's army, came to California in 1837. He made one of the earliest surveys of Yerba Buena and also mapped New Helvetia for Sutter.



black-eyed, bushy-bearded, lank and nervous, and chewed tobacco as a schoolgirl chews gum—as though the lower jaw was run by clockwork. Standing at the counter, he took out a greasy purse and out of that produced a little rag, which he carefully opened, disclosing a few thin flakes of a dull yellow metal. “That there,” said he in an undertone, “is gold, and I know it, and know where it comes from, and there’s a plenty more in the same place, certain and sure!”

Too thin! What would have been the modern criticism on the specimens and on the stranger’s profession of faith in them? He was not in the least excited, and we set him down as acting a part. Other townspeople came into the store, and the little rag, with its lusterless bits of metal, was handed around. One said it was mica, and another that it was “fool’s gold”—he had “seen plenty of it in Oregon.” By and by the exhibitor was joined by his companion, who had inquired the way to “old Vioget’s.” I afterwards learned that he had gone there to submit some specimens to the captain for “a test,” as he was reputed to have some skill in the analysis of minerals. Vioget’s opinion, if given at all, was not revealed. The party at the store separated without any very lively impression having been made on the lookers-on, and, if I remember aright, the *Star* went to press that night without an item concerning the gold mines....

In October 1847, the first steamboat was launched into the bay in the hold of a Russian bark, consigned to Captain Leidesdorff, the American vice-consul. The little stranger came hitherward from the Russian settlements on the Amoor River and was originally destined for the inland waters of Alaska. Leidesdorff, though a foreigner, was imbued with the spirit of Yankee enterprise and foresaw the greatness of California long in advance of his American brother merchants. He had the little steamboat put together and endeavored to freight merchandise to different points on the bay. The *Sitka*, as she was called, actually made the first trip to the present site of Sacramento and was the pioneer of steam navigation

on these waters. It would detract from her fame to place on record the time of her first trip. Let the waters of the bay, in which she foundered a cable’s length from shore, be as the gentle wave of oblivion upon that page of her history. Her engine was too feeble and her hull too frail to wrestle with the northers that visited the bay that winter. She was resurrected in the spring, and her machinery having been taken out, the little craft was fitted up as a schooner and called the *Rainbow*. Having made one or two successful trips to Sonoma and San José, she was dispatched to New Helvetia (Sacramento) in April. The first gold prospecting party that left San Francisco for the mines were passengers on that trip, and their adventures will be subsequently related.

The mercantile firms doing business in San Francisco at this time were Mellus & Howard, already mentioned, who advertised “cloths, cassimeres, pantaloons of various kinds, prints, brown and white cottons, tickings, tea, coffee, sugar, molasses, Columbia River flour, gin, *aguardiente*, ale, hollow ware, iron and steel, which they offer low for cash or hides,” etc. Shelly & Norris (corner of Clay and Kearny streets), Ward & Smith, Dickson & Hay, and W. H. Davis & Co. dealt in a similar line of goods. Robert A. Parker, at the “Adobe Store” on the hill back of Portsmouth Square, and Gelston & Co. (“New York store”) at the foot of Washington Street, were the latest comers—the former from Boston—and offered fresh and assorted stocks, introducing “novelties” in dry goods and fancy articles, such as had never been seen before in this market, and only 120 days from the States. The business of these mercantile houses cannot be said to have been extensive, although the local paper congratulates its readers on the brisk business done in April, the month in which the first ripple of excitement consequent on the discovery of gold was noticed. The editor says (April 22, 1848)—“The amount of sales by our merchants this week has exceeded twenty thousand dollars.”

The inland commerce of California was carried on by means of launches, or sloops and schooners of fifteen or twenty tons burthen, used chiefly for hide droghing purposes. The coast trade was confined to half a dozen brigs and schooners, running between San Francisco and the Columbia River, or the southern ports of Santa Cruz, Monterey, San Pedro, and a Mexican port or two. There was a monthly arrival from the Sandwich Islands and an occasional visitor from China. An eastern arrival was an event to make merry over. During December 1847 and the three first months of 1848, there were fourteen arrivals of all kinds, two of which were from China and South American ports, the Sandwich Islands and coastwise traders. In the fall of the year (about September), the whalers of the North Pacific dropped in to water and recruit supplies. Our merchants were ever casting hungry eyes in the direction of this whaling fleet and fishing assiduously for these fishermen.

The historian of these times will find a barren page when he carries his search into the local annals after religious educational items. The billiard-rooms of the two hotels provided the chief mental and moral pasturage of the average San Franciscan of those times for the entire seven days of the week. It is proper to state, however, that there was very little drunkenness and rarely a case of disorder. The town was governed almost without the aid of a constable. Gambling of course there was, as in every unreformed Mexican *pueblo*. The Town Council of 1848 made an effort to abolish it, but, some of its own members having been caught trying their hand in secret places at monte, the attempt was abandoned. The first schoolhouse was erected during the fall of 1847. It stood on the southwest corner of Portsmouth Square, occupying a part of the *plaza* itself. It was a little one-story frame building and passed subsequently through a variety of uses. In the winter of 1847-48 it was used for religious purposes. The first regularly organized Protestant congregation in San Francisco held its services there.

We didn't believe in it; we didn't profess to believe in it! The first party to the gold mines was not a party to any such miserable fraud as we believed the pretended gold discoveries to be. They would have told you—and it was true—that they were not going to look for gold; they had not lost any gold—and if Captain Sutter's mill hands on the American Fork had found gold, they ought to be allowed to keep it....

The first party that left San Francisco to go to the gold mines consisted of Major Pierson B. Reading, George McKinstry, Jr., and the editor [Kemble] of the little paper already mentioned; time of year, the last week in March or the first in April [1848]; conveyance, Leidesdorff's "launch" or schooner, the *Rainbow*. Major Reading, the accomplished gentleman, the adventurous pioneer, the amateur trapper and hunter, and the gallant soldier, will be remembered by all the old Californians. McKinstry was a pleasant writer and companion and was employed at Sutter's Fort in keeping the hospitable captain's books and accounts. The editor of the *Star* was a youth, not out of his teens, a printer and pioneer, who had served in the campaign in the south under Frémont....

This was the party, and the vessel in which they embarked was admirably suited to the occasion—full of the suggestions of failure. The *Rainbow* was one of those morning illuminations at which "sailors take warning"; it had not bright promise to be fulfilled. It was the hull of the little *Sitka*, the pioneer steamboat on the bay, from which the boiler and engine had been removed—the shell of the grub from which the butterfly had departed. Keats, the poet, says of a maiden divested of her crinoline and drawing the drapery of her couch about her to lie down to pleasant dreams, that it was—"As though a rose would shut and be a bud again."

This, in the language of high art, was the *Rainbow*. Her captain and supercargo was Glidden, a young clerk in the employ of

Leidesdorff. The party embarked in the best of spirits, although it was the first trip of the vessel, in her schooner-rig, up the Sacramento, and sailors pronounced her too crank for the stiff winds of the bay. Departing on the “last of the ebb, to meet the flood at Angel’s Island” (the sailing directions of all launches in those times), the day was so beautiful, the bay and landscape so bright—spread around them in such unbroken quiet and repose—that they were inspired to raise song and chorus, suggested no doubt by the captain’s name:

“’Twas there I met ole Johnny Glidden, long time ago!”

One trip up the Sacramento in those weary days and nights of schooner navigation—of flapping sails and “ashen breezes” by day, and flapjacks and ashcakes and embattled hosts of mosquitoes along the banks at night—was so much like another, and either one or the other so uninviting of repetition that even the reproduction of the incidents of such a one as I am narrating seems undesirable. The party were from five to seven days on the journey. At “old Schwartz’,” on the river, a few miles below the *embarcadero* of Sutter’s Fort (present site of Sacramento) they stopped to have a feast of salmon....

The *Rainbow* made her landing in fine style, all ill omens having failed on the trip, and Major Reading’s little Indian body servant, who had accompanied him from San Francisco, ran up to the fort to apprise Captain Sutter of the arrival. Soon there were saddle horses led by an Indian *vaquero* galloping through the trees to be placed at the disposal of the major for the conveyance of the party to the fort. The setting sun was throwing a flood of mellow light beneath the arching branches, brightening the silver shafts of the cottonwood and turning to molten gold the miniature lakes spread out on every side....

The next morning after their arrival, the gold hunters (still disclaiming such a title, however) resumed their journey. During the

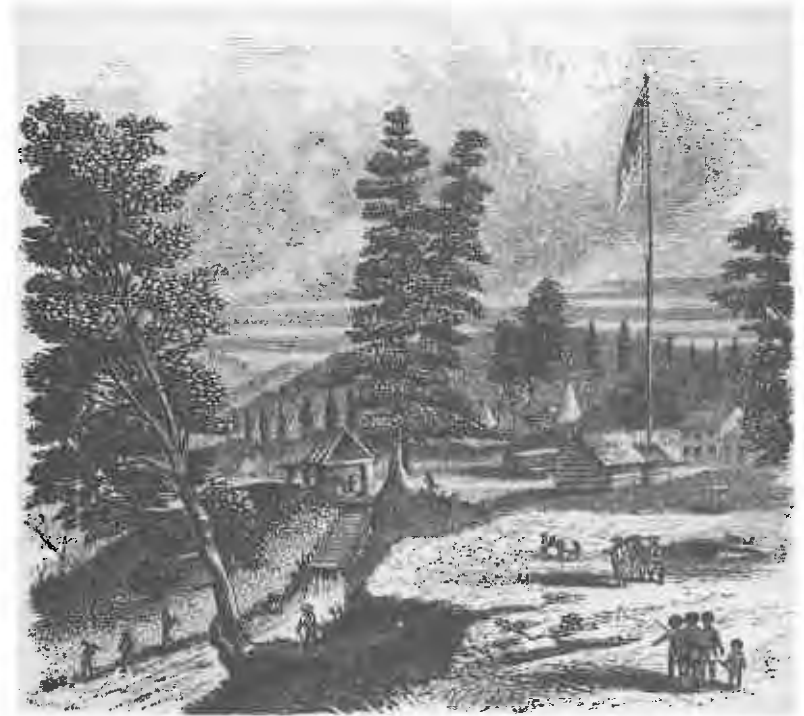
evening spent with Captain Sutter they had not been specially enlightened in regard to the discoveries. If Captain Sutter was a believer in their importance, he managed to hide it from his friends more successfully than the artless old gentleman concealed anything before or since. [James] Marshall’s enthusiasm appeared rather to amuse than convince him, though he was troubled at the shape matters had taken at the mill. Work had been suspended on account of high water, and the men did not even appear disposed to engage in logging while the mill lay idle. Out of his anxiety for the fate of the mill, rather than interest in the new discoveries, Captain Sutter consented to take one of the party to the gold mines. He had been there once before, in the previous month, when Marshall, wild with excitement, had dragged him thither to behold the future scene of the world’s wonder—a few grains of dull-looking metal stopped in the quill of some mountain bird was the first remittance of gold made from the mines of California.

There was, then, Captain Sutter, Major Reading, McKinstry, and the editor aforesaid—with two Indian “boys,” Antonio and José, favorites of the captain, to look after the horses and make camp—and the party started at an early hour, because it was not expected to reach the mill before the next day. Captain Sutter, singular as it may seem, is a very poor horseman. Rarely in those days did he ever venture on the back of a horse, riding a mule in preference. On this occasion he was mounted on a favorite mule called Katy. Frequently that morning, in crossing marshy places or ascending slippery paths, the captain would fall to the rear and be heard in low tones of earnest expostulation with his mule: “Now, den, Katy—de oder foot! God bless me, Katy—de oder foot, child!”

Little of interest occurred during the day’s ride, except that Major Reading, carrying a small hammer, frequently rode out from the trail to break off bits of rock, and once or twice he thought he had found traces of silver....

Straight before them, seeming so very near in the transparent atmosphere of that early morning, rose in solemn majesty the hoary heads of the Sierras. How reverend their aspect, how fixed and immutable their mien! A wild, wild group of mountains intervened, and then the beautiful vale of Coloma, nestling at their feet, cleft by the cold, rushing waters of the American. The hills that stand around it are clad with dense forests of evergreen. From the nearest summits, the pine and redwood rear high their sturdy crests motionless and without a murmur, or the song of a bird from their branches. The course of the river is lost to the eye in the dense growth of forest—we can scarcely catch at this distance the sound of its white, flashing waters. Only one sign of life, and that is a thin, blue column of smoke ascending dreamily from the depths of the vale, marking the locality of the lumbermen's camp.

Down the hill we rode, single file, with jingling Spanish spurs and bridle-bit, shaping our course for the camp without regard to the meanderings of the trail. The sun was well up in the heavens, but the eastern slopes of the mountains lay buried in the shadows. The major, on his iron-gray steed, led the way, glancing right and left from under his broad-brimmed hat for silver signs, while the captain, on his mule, brought up the rear, picking his steps with anxious care, grasping the pommel of the saddle and dropping a word of earnest expostulation now and then to Katy. The chill air of the valley steals around us, and the roar of the rapids rises upon our ears. On a beach of land near the base of the long hill that we are descending, under majestic, spreading trees, we spy the camp of Marshall and his companions. It is a rude bivouac in the open air, with blankets, smoke-blackened kettles and tins, and provender sacks and boxes strewn all around, as though the men were on a march. The morning meal had been consumed, and the lumbering crew (they would have passed for a "lumbering" set most anywhere) were sitting or sprawling on the ground about the smolder-



Sutter's Mill as it appeared in 1848, from *The Annals of San Francisco*, 1855. Courtesy of the California Historical Society, North Baker Research Library, FN-31311.

ing fire. They hardly returned our greeting as we rode up. It was apparent from the first moment we came in sight, we were unwelcome guests. We had not been slow to perceive in the words and looks that were exchanged before we came within hearing that the object of our visit was well understood and would receive no aid or encouragement from Marshall and his friends.

We unsaddled our beasts, and while Captain Sutter and Marshall started off by themselves, the major and the rest of the party endeavored to gain a little information respecting the gold discovery from the other lumbermen. Opening oysters with a wooden toothpick would have been an easy task compared to that

job. One of the fellows “allowed” he didn’t “go much on its being gold, anyway.” Another guessed Marshall was a “little mite cracked” on the subject. In answer to the direct question where the gold was found, the reply was, “Oh, anywhere along the race or down by the river, where you’ve a mind to try for it.” Which was true enough, as it afterwards appeared, but intended to be a very smart and evasive answer. Marshall, when afterwards asked to designate the precise locality where he first discovered the gold, took a large chip and, without speaking, made two scratches upon it with the point of a knife with which he had been moodily whittling, and then struck the blade in where the lines intersected, jerking out only the word “thar,” and going on with his whittling without deigning any further explanation. No wonder men said Marshall was crazy. But he was not crazy; he was only eccentric, and just now he was acting a part.

Whew! It was getting warm as the sun began to send his rays vertically into the valley. There was not a breath of air. The major proposed that we should try our luck gold mining “along the race or the river or anywhere.” So, borrowing an Indian basket, one of those handsome, water-tight utensils, woven of grass and ornamented with the gay plumage of the scarlet-winged chenete—a household vessel very common in those days—we walked down to the nearest point of the mill race. The major filled the basket with earth and commenced the laborious process of washing for gold after the fashion of the placer miners in southern California. It was a new operation to the lookers on—probably Reading himself had never tried his hand at it before. It was very slow—we looked in vain for a sign of gold when the black sand was reached. “Try again,” said the major, cheerily, proceeding to refill the basket. Higher rose the sun and hotter fell his beams on boulder and stream. The mill stood idle and deserted a few hundred yards below us. We began to look around for a shade. The major bent his back to his work.

Slowly, we walked down to the mill. Everything appeared unfinished or finished in haste, and a mechanic would have called it a bad job the moment his eye fell on the work. The dam was overflowed; the water had backed up into the race and nearly surrounded the mill. We saw no traces of gold-digging, nor could we find where men had washed their gold. Some Indians appeared on the other side. They were on their way up to the camp to talk with their friend, Captain Sutter, whose arrival in the valley they seem to have ascertained by a sort of instinct.

We left the river and wandered back into the woods, leaving the major twirling and dipping his basket while we slowly directed our steps by a shaded path to the camp. The churlish and inhospitable crew of lumbermen had gone out to make a feint of logging, or some other labor, for Captain Sutter’s satisfaction. Our Indian boys prepared a lunch, and soon the Indians dropped in, one by one, and after a friendly salutation, sat down and eyed us in silence. Sutter came up and there was a grand handshaking, and now from another quarter, “remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow,” approaches the sole representative of the mining interest in our party. He is greeted with a quiet “what success, major?” and replies, “not enough to buy a drink,” which would be literally less than the value of a Spanish real in gold. There could be no reality in such gold discoveries as these. So we dropped the subject for the time being, and the editor of the *Star* noted in his memorandum book, as a subject for his next week’s paper, the practical result of a test made of the gold-producing qualities of the soil at the alleged gold mines, and wrote overall, in emphatic character, “humbug.”

That evening, when the cold dews began to descend, we heaped up the lumbermen’s fire with logs and turned to our Indian visitors, each of whom had been provided with his supper and a present, and asked them what they knew about gold in these mountains. They replied that they knew much about it—that it was very

bad. As this seemed to confirm the editor of the *Star* in his opinion, he was naturally desirous to know more. So Captain Sutter, through one of his boys acting as interpreter and turning it into Spanish, elicited the surprising fact that the existence of the gold had been known to the Indians for many generations, and that it was considered by them as owned and guarded by evil spirits. There was a lake, said the chief speaker, not far from here, where there is plenty of this bad medicine, but it is guarded by a fearful animal. The Indian described him as a species of dragon, which had an unpleasant appetite for human flesh and would devour all who came into his domains for gold.

The Indians appeared to know nothing of the value of the yellow metal, and the conclusion we reached after hearing their statement was that the early mission *padres* had obtained a knowledge of the gold mines and had warned their Indian proselytes not to tamper with them, intending to develop these mines with Indian labor someday. Such a knowledge certainly existed among the Franciscans who founded the California missions, and it may be that gold mining was carried on by them in a small way by means of Indians. The first mining regularly attempted after the discoveries of 1848 was prosecuted mainly by the aid of Indians. Until the dastardly outrage committed on a party of unoffending Indians by drunken Oregon desperados in the spring of this year, there was no difficulty in getting labor from these humble people. The shooting of half a dozen in cold blood, after they had been lured into camp on a pretense of friendship, drove the tribes into the mountains and provoked retaliations, which cost the lives of several innocent white men. This was the beginning of troubles between the red race and our own people in California. As usual, the whites were the cruel aggressors.

The first party to the gold mines from San Francisco in 1848 returned as empty-handed as it had started, so far as the mere ac-

quisition of gold was concerned. In the acquisition of knowledge it was more successful. The editor of the *California Star*, for example, had derived, as he believed, facts which justified him in proclaiming the gold discoveries to be a delusion and a snare. Accordingly, the next issue of the paper after his arrival denounced the whole theory and alleged success as an arrant cheat and imposture. The *Stars* in their courses fought against the gold mines.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Two weeks later, on May 12, 1848, Brannan shouted, "Gold! Gold! Gold from the American River!" in downtown San Francisco. By May 15, the town's population plummeted as almost every resident clamored to reach Sutter's Mill. By the middle of June, even Kemble had caught gold fever. His *Star* ceased publication with the final line: "We have done. Let our word of parting be, *Hasta Luego*."