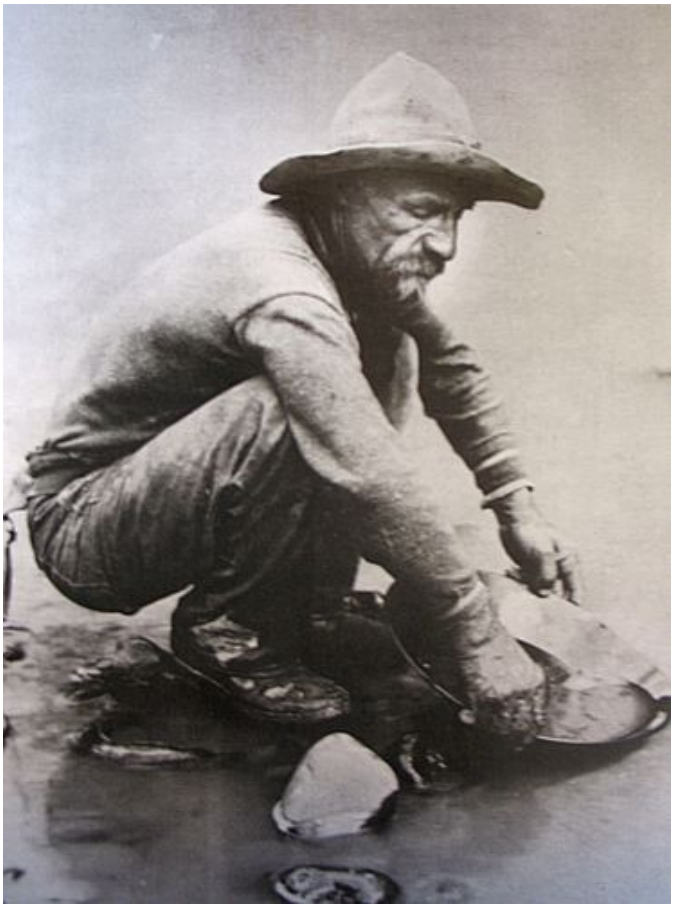
Westward Expansion - The California Gold Rush

by ReadWorks



panning for gold

The year was 1848. John A. Sutter was building a new sawmill in Coloma, near Sacramento, California. The area was mostly wilderness. He never expected the treasure that the unexplored land held. In January 1848, the chief builder of the sawmill found Sutter one rainy afternoon. The chief made him lock all of the doors to his office. Then, in a secret voice, the chief told Sutter about a **discovery** that would change the entire West Coast of the United States. He had discovered gold in the stream near the sawmill.

Sutter asked all of his workers to keep the news a secret for just 6 weeks. But it was hopeless. The news spread like wildfire. Everyone wanted some gold. The American West was advertised all over as a land full of promise and **wealth**. Soon accounts of gold were greatly exaggerated. In early 1849 the editor of the *New York Tribune* wrote: "**Fortune** lies upon the surface of the earth as **plentiful** as the mud in our streets." People had gold fever.

Tens of thousands of men traveled to the West Coast to seek their **fortune**. These men were nicknamed "forty-niners." Have you heard the song "Oh My Darling, Clementine"? That folk song is

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about the miners who came west. High in his hopes, one man called California "a land of glittering dreams."

However, life was not always rosy for the miners. Their day-to-day life was very difficult. Most miners never found the slightest trace of gold, much less enough to strike it rich. Still, the vast California countryside contained endless possibility. This sense of possibility was the allure of the American West.

One of the greatest **fortunes** made from the gold rush had nothing to do with gold. In the spirit of invention, Sam Brannan came up with a scheme. He had found out about the gold from a reliable source. But at first the tale seemed too tall to believe. Brannan changed all of this. He ran through the streets of San Francisco yelling and carrying a bottle of gold dust.

Why did he want everyone to know about the gold? Well, Brannan never even planned to search for gold. He had no interest in digging or panning for specks of yellow. Instead, he planned to make even more money. Brannan knew that the flocks of miners would need tools. He started a business selling them shovels. Brannan sold shovels to thousands and thousands of fortune-seekers. He made more money than all of them.

By the end of 1849, most of the gold was gone. Still people kept digging. The population of California grew steadily. At one point, on average, 30 homes a day were built in San Francisco! Soon the huge population increase of the West Coast would lead to the United States' decision to build a continental railroad.

Excerpt from "Oh My Darling, Clementine"

In a cavern, in a canyon

Excavating for a mine

Dwelt a miner forty-niner

And his daughter Clementine

Oh my darling, oh my darling

Oh my darling, Clementine

You are lost and gone forever

Dreadful sorry, Clementine

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Name: _____ **Date:** _____

1. What did John A. Sutter find in 1848?

A. thousands and thousands of shovels

B. gold in the stream near a California sawmill

C. new homes built in San Francisco

D. a newspaper article about the gold rush

2. What caused tens of thousands of men to travel to the West Coast?

A. These men wanted to meet John A. Sutter to work at his new sawmill near Sacramento.

B. These men wanted to join Sam Brannan in selling shovels to make their fortune.

C. These men heard about gold in California and wanted to make their fortune by mining for it.

D. These men went to build homes in San Francisco since there was plenty of land there.

3. Read the following sentences from the text.

"Everyone wanted some gold. The American West was advertised all over as a land full of promise and wealth. Soon accounts of gold were greatly exaggerated. In early 1849 the editor of the New York Tribune wrote: 'Fortune lies upon the surface of the earth as plentiful as the mud in our streets.' People had gold fever."

What conclusion can you draw from this evidence?

A. Most people who moved to the American West in 1849 were not interested in mining for gold.

B. People were getting sick from gold dust, which caused high fevers.

C. The New York Tribune shared specific and accurate facts about exactly how much gold there was in California.

D. Newspapers helped spread the idea that anyone could get rich quickly by moving out West.

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4. According to the text, why might the gold rush have contributed to the decision to build a continental railroad across the United States?

A. It boosted the West Coast's population so much that they needed a railroad for people and goods to travel to other parts of the country.

B. Miners needed a quick way to transport their gold back east, causing the government to build a railroad for easy access.

C. Sam Brannan's success in selling shovels created a demand for a railroad to transport tools across the country quickly.

D. The excitement of finding gold inspired a new trend where people started using trains to travel instead of covered wagons.

5. What is the main idea of the text?

A. The 1848 gold rush led thousands to California in search of fortune, but most miners who settled on the West Coast did not find gold.

B. John A. Sutter was building a new sawmill in Coloma, near Sacramento, California in an area that was mostly wilderness.

C. Sam Brannan came up with a smart scheme to tell more people about the gold he found so he could sell more shovels to miners and make his fortune.

D. The population of California grew steadily over the years, leading to many new homes being built in San Francisco.

6. Read the following sentences from the text.

"Most miners never found the slightest trace of gold, much less enough to strike it rich. Still, the vast California countryside contained endless **possibility**. This sense of possibility was the allure of the American West."

As used in this excerpt, what does the word "**possibility**" most closely mean?

A. lies

B. dangers

C. honesty

D. promise

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7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Some people made a lot of money from the gold rush without mining for gold. _____, Sam Brennan made his fortune selling shovels to miners.

A. Before

B. For example

C. However

D. Above all

8. What happened to most miners who went to California to find gold?

9. In the passage the author writes, "... life was not always rosy for the miners. Their day-to-day life was very difficult." In what ways do you think the life a miner would have been difficult?

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