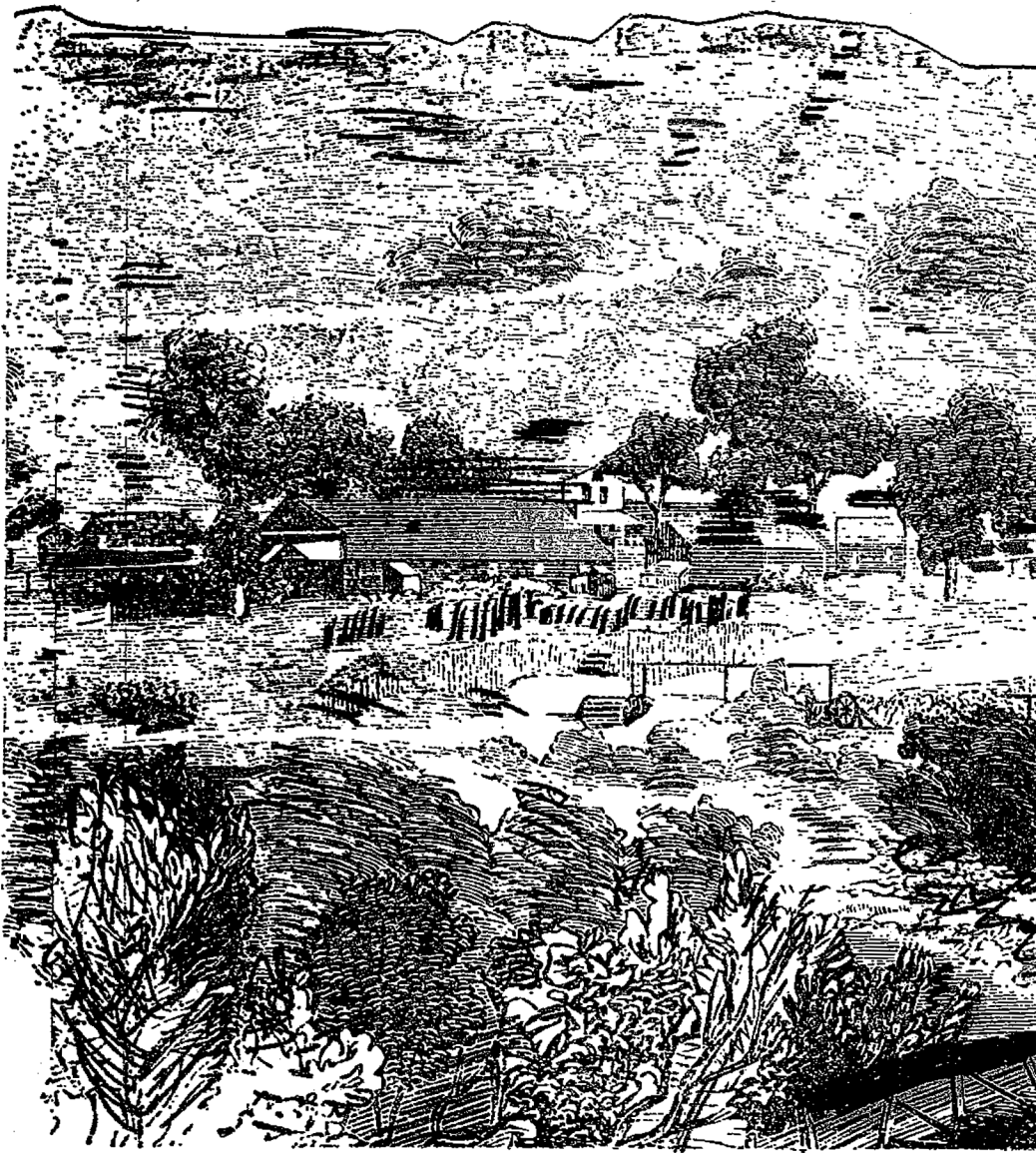


# THE CALIFORNIA GOLD DISCOVERY

Sources, Documents, Accounts and Memoirs  
Relating to the Discovery of Gold  
at Sutter's Mill.

*BY* RODMAN W. PAUL



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asked me where I expected to find a road and timber, and I promptly gave them my views and directions.

They departed, I believe in company, but finally separated, and P. L. Wimmer found pine timber and a road, on what is now known as the Sacramento and Diamond Springs road, and about the 12th of May, Gingery and Wimmer commenced work, about thirteen miles west of the (now called) Shingle Spring House.

On the 16th of May, having completed my work for Capt. Sutter, I started, with an Indian boy, — Treador, and W. A. Graves, (who is now residing in Butte county, and heard the conversation between myself, Gingery, Wimmer and McLellan,) accompanied me for the purpose of seeing the mountains. On the 18th of May we entered the valley of Culluma [Coloma]; and on the 20th Gingery joined our company. We then traveled up the stream now called Weber creek—the Indian name of which is Pul-Pul-Mull—to the head of the creek; thence higher in the mountains until we arrived at the South Fork of the American river, where it divides into two branches of about equal size; from whence we returned by Sly Park and Pleasant Valley to the Fort.

On my arrival I gave Capt. Sutter an account of my trip, and what I had discovered. He thereupon proposed to me a partnership; but before we were ready to commence operations, some persons who had tried, in vain, to find Culluma, reported to Sutter that I “had made a false representation, for they could find no such place.” To settle matters, Capt. Sutter furnished me with a Mission Indian, who was Alcalde of the Cosumnes tribe, as an interpreter and guide —trusting partly to the Indian’s report, as to the propriety of the proposed co-partnership.

The report which I had made on my first trip having been fully confirmed by observations on the second, the co-partnership was completed, and about the 27th of August we signed the agreement to build and run a saw-mill at Culluma. On the third day (I think) afterwards, I set out, with two wagons, and was accompanied by the following persons, employed by the firm of Sutter & Marshall, viz.: P. L. Wimmer and family, James Barger, Ira Willis, Sidney Willis, Alex. Stephens, Wm. Cunce, James Brown, and Ezekiah Persons.

On our arrival in the Valley we first built the double log cabin, afterwards known as Hastings & Co.’s store. About the last of September, as Capt. Sutter wanted a couple of capable men to construct a dam across the American river at the grist-mill—near where the Pavilion now stands—I sent the two Willis, as the most capable; (Wm. Cunce being in feeble health, left about the same time;) and

I received Henry Bigler, Israel Smith, Wm. Johnston and — Evans in return; and shortly afterwards I employed Charles Bennet and Wm. Scott, both carpenters. The above named individuals, with some ten Indians, constituted my whole force.

While we were in the habit at night of turning the water through the tail race we had dug for the purpose of widening and deepening the race, I used to go down in the morning to see what had been done by the water through the night; and about half past seven on or about the 19th of January—I am not quite certain to a day, but it was between the 18th and 20th of that month—1848, I went down as usual, and after shutting off the water from the race I stepped into it, near the lower end, and there, upon the rock, about six inches beneath the surface of the water, I DISCOVERED THE GOLD. I was entirely alone at the time. I picked up one or two pieces and examined them attentively; and having some general knowledge of minerals, I could not call to mind more than two which in any way resembled this—*sulphuret of iron*, very bright and brittle; and *gold*, bright, yet malleable; I then tried it between two rocks, and found that it could be beaten into a different shape, but not broken. I then collected four or five pieces and went up to Mr. Scott (who was working at the carpenter's bench making the mill wheel) with the pieces in my hand, and said, "I have found it."

"What is it?" inquired Scott.

"Gold," I answered.

"Oh! no," returned Scott, "that can't be."

I replied positively,—*"I know it to be nothing else."*

Mr. Scott was the second person who saw the gold. W. J. Johnston, A. Stephens, H. Bigler, and J. Brown, who were also working in the mill yard, were then called up to see it. Peter L. Wimmer, Mrs. Jane Wimmer, C. Bennet, and J. Smith, were at the house; the latter two of whom were sick; E. Persons and John Wimmer, (a son of P. L. Wimmer), were out hunting oxen at the same time. About 10 o'clock the same morning, P. L. Wimmer came down from the house, and was very much surprised at the discovery, when the metal was shown him; and which he took home to show his wife, who, the next day, made some experiments upon it by boiling it in strong lye, and saleratus; and Mr. Bennet by my directions beat it very thin.

Four days afterwards I went to the Fort for provisions, and carried with me about three ounces of the gold, which Captain Sutter and I tested with *nitric acid*. I then tried it in Sutter's presence by taking three silver dollars and balancing them by the dust in the air, then immersed both in water, and the superior weight of the gold satisfied us both of its nature and value.

gress, 1st session, House Executive Document 17, January 24, 1850, pp. 528-536).

HEADQUARTERS TENTH MILITARY DEPARTMENT,

Monterey, California, August 17, 1848.

*Sir:* I have the honor to inform you that, accompanied by Lieutenant W. T. Sherman, 3d artillery, acting assistant adjutant general, I started on the 12th of June last to make a tour through the northern part of California. My principal purpose, however, was to visit the newly-discovered gold placer in the valley of the Sacramento.

I had proceeded about forty miles when I was overtaken by an express, bringing me intelligence of the arrival at Monterey of the United States storeship Southampton, with important letters from Commodore Shubrick and Lieutenant Colonel Burton. I returned at once to Monterey, and despatched what business was most important, and on the 17th resumed my journey. We reached San Francisco on the 20th, and found that all, or nearly all, its male population had gone to the mines. The town, which a few months before was so busy and thriving, was then almost deserted. On the evening of the 24th, the horses of the escort were crossed to Sausalito in a launch, and on the following day we resumed the journey, by way of Bodega and Sonoma, to Sutter's Fort, where we arrived on the morning of the 2d of July. Along the whole route mills were lying idle, fields of wheat were open to cattle and horses, houses vacant, and farms going to waste. At Sutter's there was more life and business. Launches were discharging their cargoes at the river, and carts were hauling goods to the fort, where already were established several stores, a hotel, &c. Captain Sutter had only two mechanics in his employ—a wagon-maker and blacksmith—whom he was then paying ten dollars per day. Merchants pay him a monthly rent of one hundred dollars per room, and whilst I was there a two-story house in the fort was rented as a hotel for five hundred dollars a month.

At the urgent solicitation of many gentlemen, I delayed there to participate in the first public celebration of our national anniversary at that fort, but on the 5th resumed the journey and proceeded twenty-five miles up the American Fork, to a point on it now known as the lower mines, or Mormon diggings. The hill sides were thickly strewn with canvass tents and bush arbors. A store was erected, and several boarding shanties in operation. The day was intensely hot; yet about two hundred men were at work in the full glare of the sun, washing for gold, some with tin pans, some with close-woven Indian baskets, but the greater part had a rude machine known as the cradle. This is on rockers six or eight feet long, open at the foot, and at its head has a coarse grate and sieve; the bottom is

rounded, with small cleets nailed across. Four men are required to work this machine; one digs the gravel in the bank close by the stream, another carries it to the cradle and empties it on the grate, a third gives a violent rocking motion to the machine, whilst a fourth dashes water on from the stream itself. The sieve keeps the coarse stones from entering the cradle, the current of water washes off the earthy matter, and the gravel is gradually carried out at the foot of the machine, leaving the gold mixed with a fine heavy black sand above the first cleets. The sand and gold, mixed together, are then drawn off through auger holes into a pan below, are dried in the sun, and afterwards separated by blowing off the sand. A party of four men thus employed at the lower mines averaged a hundred dollars a day. The Indians, and those who have nothing but pans or willow baskets, gradually wash out the earth and separate the gravel by hand, leaving nothing but the gold mixed with sand, which is separated in the manner before described. The gold in the lower mines is in fine bright scales, of which I send several specimens.

As we ascended the south branch of the American Fork, the country became more broken and mountainous, and at the sawmill, twenty-five miles above the lower washings, or fifty miles from Sutter's, the hills rise to about a thousand feet above the level of the Sacramento plain. Here a species of pine occurs, which led to the discovery of the gold. Captain Sutter, feeling the great want of lumber, contracted, in September last, with a Mr. Marshall, to build a saw-mill at that place. It was erected in the course of the past winter and spring—a dam and race constructed; but when the water was let on the wheel, the tail race was found to be too narrow to permit the water to escape with sufficient rapidity. Mr. Marshall, to save labor, let the water directly into the race, with a strong current, so as to wash it wider and deeper. He effected his purpose, and a large bed of mud and gravel was carried to the foot of the race. One day Mr. Marshall, when walking down the race to this deposite of mud, observed some glittering particles at its upper edge: he gathered a few, examined them, and became satisfied of their value. He then went to the fort, told Captain Sutter of his discovery, and they agreed to keep it secret until a certain grist-mill of Sutter's was finished. It however got out, and spread like magic. Remarkable success attended the labors of the first explorers, and in a few weeks hundreds of men were drawn thither. At the time of my visit, but little more than three months after its first discovery, it was estimated that upwards of four thousand people were employed. At the mill there is a fine deposite, or bank of gravel, which the people respect as the property of Captain Sutter, although he pre-

as laboring men at the mines can now earn in *one day* more than double a soldier's pay and allowances for a month, and even the pay of a lieutenant or captain cannot hire a servant. A carpenter or mechanic would not listen to an offer of less than fifteen or twenty dollars a day. Could any combination of affairs try a man's fidelity more than this? And I really think some extraordinary mark of favor should be given to those soldiers who remain faithful to their flag throughout this tempting crisis. No officer can now live in California on his pay. Money has so little value, the prices of necessary articles of clothing and subsistence are so exorbitant, and labor so high, that to hire a cook or servant has become an impossibility, save to those who are earning from thirty to fifty dollars a day. This state of things cannot last forever; yet, from the geographical position of California, and the new character it has assumed as a mining country, prices of labor will always be high, and will hold out temptations to desert. I therefore have to report, if the government wish to prevent desertions here on the part of men, and to secure zeal on the part of officers, their pay must be increased very materially. Soldiers both of the volunteer and regular service discharged in this country should be permitted at once to locate their land warrants in the gold district. Many private letters have gone to the United States giving accounts of the vast quantity of gold recently discovered, and it may be a matter of surprise why I have made no report on this subject at an earlier date. The reason is, that I could not bring myself to believe the reports that I heard of the wealth of the gold district until I visited it myself. I have no hesitation now in saying that there is more gold in the country drained by the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers than will pay the cost of the present war with Mexico a hundred times over. No capital is required to obtain this gold, as the laboring man wants nothing but his pick, shovel, and tin pan, with which to dig and wash the gravel; and many frequently pick gold out of the crevices of rock with their butcher knives in pieces from one to six ounces.

Mr. Dye, a gentleman residing in Monterey, and worthy of every credit, has just returned from Feather river. He tells me that the company to which he belonged worked seven weeks and two days, with an average of fifty Indians, (washers,) and that their gross product was 273 pounds of gold. His share, one-seventh, after paying all expenses, is about 37 pounds, which he brought with him and exhibits in Monterey. I see no laboring man from the mines who does not show his two, three, or four pounds of gold. A soldier of the artillery company returned here a few days ago from the mines, having been absent on furlough twenty days; he made by trading

and working during that time \$1,500. During these twenty days he was travelling ten or eleven days, leaving but a week, in which he made a sum of money greater than he receives in pay, clothes, and rations during a whole enlistment of five years. These statements appear incredible, but they are true.

Gold is believed also to exist on the eastern slopes of the Sierra Nevada; and when at the mines, I was informed by an intelligent Mormon that it had been found near the Great Salt lake by some of his fraternity. Nearly all the Mormons are leaving California to go to the Salt lake, and this they surely would not do unless they were sure of finding gold there in the same abundance as they now do on the Sacramento.

The gold "placer" near the mission of San Fernando has long been known, but has been but little wrought for want of water. This is a spur that puts off from the Sierra Nevada, (see Fremont's map,) the same in which the present mines occur. There is therefore, every reason to believe that in the intervening space of five hundred miles (entirely unexplored) there must be many hidden and rich deposits.

The placer gold is now substituted as currency of this country; in trade it passes freely at \$16 per ounce; as an article of commerce its value is not yet fixed. The only purchase I made was of the specimen No. 7, which I got of Mr. Neligh at \$12 the ounce. That is about the present cash value in the country, although it has been sold for less. The great demand for goods and provisions made by this sudden development of wealth has increased the amount of commerce at San Francisco very much, and it will continue to increase.

I would recommend that a mint be established at some eligible point on the bay of San Francisco, and that machinery, and all the apparatus and workmen, be sent by sea. These workmen must be bound by high wages, and even bonds, to secure their faithful services; else the whole plan may be frustrated by their going to the mines as soon as they arrive in California. If this course be not adopted, gold to the amount of many millions of dollars will pass yearly to other countries, to enrich their merchants and capitalists. Before leaving the subject of mines, I will mention that on my return from the Sacramento I touched at New Almoden, the quicksilver mine of Mr. Alexander Forbes, consul of her Britannic Majesty at Tepic. This mine is in a spur of mountains 1,000 feet above the level of the bay of San Francisco, and is distant in a southern direction from the Pueblo San Jose about twelve miles. The ore (cinnabar) occurs in a large vein dipping at a strong angle to the horizon. Mexican miners are employed in working it, by driving shafts and galleries