

Primary Source: Gold in California!

from "Trenton State Gazette" (New Jersey) September 16, 1848

On January 24, 1848, gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill near present-day El Dorado County, California. At that time, California was a new territory of the United States and sparsely populated. It took a while for the news to reach the established parts of the U.S. The first publication of the discovery was in a New York newspaper on August 19, 1848. Other newspapers quickly picked up the announcement. Below is the announcement from the Trenton State Gazette (New Jersey) on September 16, 1848. As the news spread, the rush was on, and an estimated 300,000 prospectors flooded into California.

The text is duplicated exactly as it appeared in the newspaper. For comparison, \$1 in 1848 is roughly equivalent to \$30 today.

Gold in

California.

A correspondent of the North American writing in Monterey, in California says:

The sands which border Feather River and the American Fork abound in particles of gold—resembling in shape snowflakes. These are separated from the sand by stirring them in water in a basin or bowl. A person will collect from this simple process from one to two ounces of gold a day—some have gone as high as six and eight ounces. There are probably now not less than five thousand persons, whites and indians, gathering this gold. San Francisco, Sonoma, Santa Cruz and San Jose, are all literally deserted by their inhabitants; all have gone to the gold regions. The farmers have thrown aside their ploughs, the lawyers their briefs, the doctors their pills, the priests their prayer books, and all are now digging gold. The diamond-broached gentlemen and the clouted indian work side by side, lovingly as if they had been rocked in the same cradle. Tin pans, to wash the sparkling sand in, have sold as high as eight dollars a-piece—shovels for ten—and wooden bowls for five! A trough scooped from a hollow tree, ten feet long, and with a hollow sieve attached, sells for a hundred and twenty five dollars.— Boards are five hundred dollars for a thousand feet.

A very large company left Monterey today for the gold scene—some on horses, some in wagons, some in carts, some on foot, and some on crutches. The tract of land where the gold is found covers a hundred miles in one direction and fifty in another. It is said that ten thousand men in ten years could not exhaust it. As soon as the news reached Oregon we shall have a large emigration from that quarter. Nobody thinks of fighting here any longer the natives have gone for gold, the sailors have run from their ships, and the soldiers from their camps, for the same purpose. The last vessel that left the coast was obliged to ship an entire new crew, and pay each fifty dollars a month. No one can be hired to dig gold short of sixteen or twenty dollars per day—he prefers working on his own hook—he may make less than that, but he has a chance of making much more.

Questions

1. Today the price of an ounce of pure gold is around \$1,300. What would a prospector make in today's money if he found six ounces of gold in a day?
2. Why do you think so many people rushed to California to find gold?
3. In today's money, how much did the prospectors pay for a shovel?
4. What kind of impact do you think this article had on its readers in 1848?