

## History

According to California Indian traditional beliefs, their ancestors were created here and have lived here forever. Most anthropologists believe California Indians descended from people who crossed from Asia into North America over a land bridge that joined the two continents late in the Pleistocene Epoch. It is thought that Native Americans lived here for 15 millenia before the first European explorer sailed California's coast in the 1500s.

European explorers came to California initially in a search for what British explorers called the Northwest Passage and what the Spaniards called the Strait of Anián. In any event, it was an attempt to find a shortcut between Asia's riches -- silk, spices, jewels -- and Europe that drove the discovery voyages. The now famous voyage of Columbus in 1492 was an attempt to find this mythical shortcut.

Forty-seven years after Columbus's voyage, Francisco de Ulloa led an expedition from Acapulco that sought a non-existent passage from the Gulf of California through to the Pacific Ocean. California was thought to be an island, in large part probably due to a Spanish novel called *Las Sergas de Esplandián* (*The Exploits of Esplandián*) written by Garcí Rodríguez Ordóñez de Montalvo.

Montalvo's mythical island of California was populated by a tribe of black women who lived like Amazons. Early explorers apparently named the Baja California peninsula after the mythical island, and in 1524 Hernán Cortés, the conqueror of the Aztec empire, reported that he expected to find an island along the northwest coast of Mexico populated by Amazons.

Three years after Ulloa's expedition, Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo led an expedition to once again locate the Strait of Anián. Cabrillo's instructions were to sail north of where Ulloa had turned back. Cabrillo's expedition sailed into San Diego Bay on September 28, 1542, making the small party of sailors that went ashore the first Europeans to visit what is today the state of California.

Cabrillo's expedition eventually travelled north to the mouth of the Russian River, north of San Francisco Bay, before turning south in the middle of November of that year.

It would be 37 more years before a buccaneer by the name of Sir Francis Drake sailed into California history. Although much discussion continues about where Drake anchored, it appears he did spend more than a month among Coastal Miwok Indians. Drake claimed his "discovery" for the English Crown, meaning that within 40 years of European discovery of California that two countries had claimed the land, neither bothering to acknowledge the rights of the natives who were already living there.

Ninety years after Drake's voyages Spain began construction of a series of missions in California with the San Diego Mission. Until 1800, the California coast was under Spanish control as far north as San Francisco. Although the missions were built with Indian labor, the natives didn't take to the newcomers without resistance.

The San Diego Mission was attacked by Indians within a month, and the first baptism wouldn't be recorded there for two years.

Disease played a significant role in reducing the native Indian population during the era of the Spanish missions. In 1777 came a respiratory epidemic, in 1802 pneumonia and diphtheria, and measles in 1806. These epidemics, together with changes in diet and inadequate nutrition contributed to a rapid decline in the Indian population.

Mexico gained its independence from Spain in 1821, and a shift came about in the government's attitude toward the Indians. First was the secularization of the missions, with half the mission property being devoted to supporting the



The "island" of California is depicted in this map.

J. Speed. "The Island of California: California as an Island Map," from *America (Map of America made in London in 1626 or 1676)*. California Historical Society, North Baker Research Library collection, FN-31949.



"Photo of etching of Drake being crowned," California Historical Society, Photography collection, FN-4334.

Indians while the remainder supported the priests and other officials.

Large land grants in California further emphasized the change from the mission approach to private enterprise. Large land grants were given to Mexican citizens, including naturalized citizens like John Sutter.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in February 1848 ceded sovereignty of Mexican lands including California to the United States. Indian populations by this time had been reduced from over 300,000 in California to less than 100,000 by a combination of disease, homicide and loss of native environment. The California Gold Rush, of course, brought even more change.

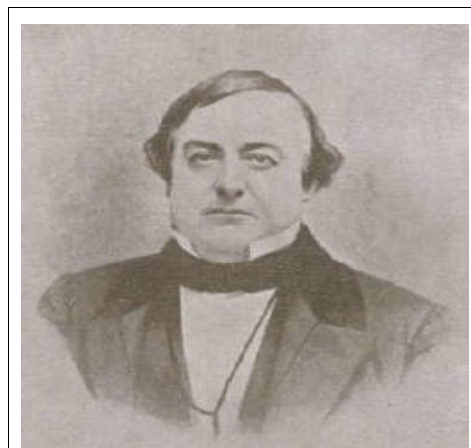
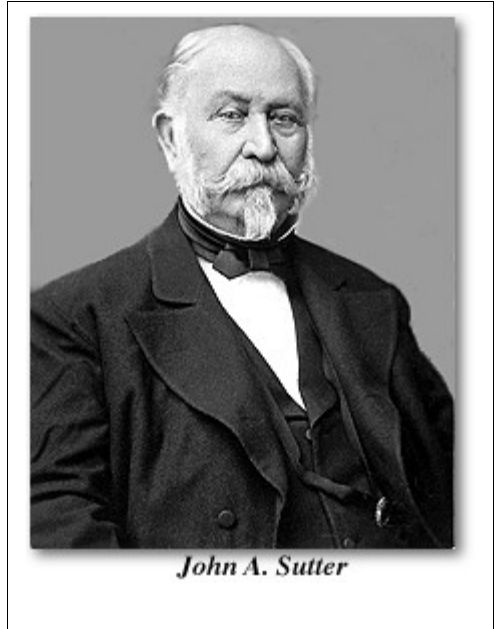
**John Marshall finds gold:**

**John Sutter isn't entirely happy about the discovery**

John Sutter (1803-1880), for whom the City of Sutter Creek was named, is perceived as an enterprising but sympathetic figure in the early American settlement of Mexican California.

John Augustus Sutter, whose name was originally Johann August Sutter, was born to Swiss parents on February 15, 1803, only 27 years after the Declaration of Independence was written, in Kandern, Baden, just north and west of Zurich in what is German today. He married Annette D'beld in Burgdorn on October 24.

Sutter left his wife and either 4 or 5 children in Bern, Switzerland in 1834, and arrived finally in California in 1839 after travels that included St. Louis, then Santa Fe, the Oregon country, the Hawaiian Islands and Sitka, Alaska.



*Juan Bautista Alvarado, California governor from 1836 to 1842, was a leader in the Californian revolt against Mexican authority.*

Sutter convinced Mexican Governor Juan Bautista Alvarado to give him a land grant comprising 48,400 acres, which was the maximum for a private rancho in Mexican California. Posing as a Swiss Guard officer forced to flee the French Revolution, Sutter convinced Alvarado that he would be a benefit in slowing the westward migration of Americans into Mexican California.

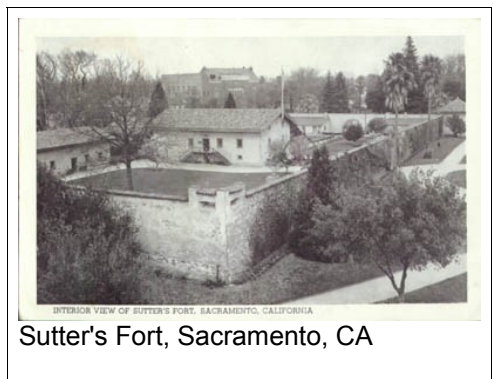
Sutter, after becoming a Mexican citizen to qualify for the land grant, names his prize Nueva Helvetia or New Switzerland. Sutter went on, with the help of Indian labor, went on to establish a productive agricultural empire in the Sacramento Valley. Sutter was also friendly with the early travelers to California, treating them with great hospitality. This wasn't what he had promised the Mexican government.

While Sutter's reputation among the white settlers and travelers was positive, his reputation with the Indians was something else entirely. The successful operation of Sutter's rancho -- as with other ranchos in Mexican California -- depended in large part on Indian labor. As products of the Spanish mission systems, the Indians were often skilled in agriculture, animal husbandry, masonry and other crafts.

Sutter commonly paid the Indians in shelter, food, clothing and perhaps some glass beads or other trinkets in exchange for their labor, building his fort, raising crops, caring for thousands of cattle, sheep, horses and hogs, catching fish, delivering pelts, and serving as soldiers against tribes Sutter suspected of stealing his horses.

Contemporary observers at Sutter's Fort claimed that Sutter resorted to slavery, denial of food and kidnapping to force Indians to work for him. It is said that he paid his Indian workers in cheap pieces of tin that could only be exchanged at his store for merchandise.

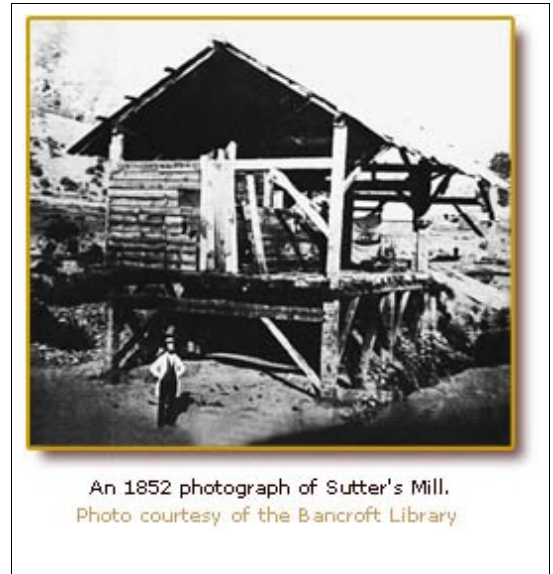
Sutter was inclined to harshly punish insubordinate actions by the Indians, such as leaving the harvest at New Helvetia to attend to a good hunting or acorn season. Sutter sent armed posses into the foothills to punish and capture "runaway" workers.



Contemporary visitors to Fort Sutter commented on Sutter's treatment of the Indians, including their being confined at night in rooms or holding pens without floors, beds or straw. According to one observer, James Clyman, "a Virginia-born mountain man who had no reason to sympathize with the Indians since they nearly took his life twice during attacks in the Rocky Mountains, nonetheless recalled in 1846 that Sutter fed his Indians like animals. 'The Capt. [Sutter] keeps 600 to 800 Indians in a complete state of Slavery and as I had the mortification of seeing them dine I may give a short description. 10 or 15 Troughs 3 or 4 feet long were brought out of the cook room and seated in the broiling sun. All the Labourers grate [sic] and small ran to the troughs like so many pigs and fed themselves with their hands as long as the troughs contained even a moisture.'" ([Historynet.com](http://Historynet.com))

Sutter nevertheless gained a reputation for treating well "overlanders who arrived at his Fort Sutter (including remnants of the ill-fated Donner Party in 1847). Wrote John Bidwell, who led the first organized party of settlers to California in 1841, wrote of Sutter that "he was one of the most liberal and hospitable of men." It should be noted that Bidwell later worked for Sutter. In any event, visitors to Fort Sutter found John Sutter to be generous and obliging, offering shelter, food and clothing, as well as the opportunity to learn something about California.

Sutter came to the foothills in search of a place for a saw mill, which he needed for wood for "the small village of Yerba Buena, (now San Francisco)" in addition to "other buildings, fences, etc." ([www.sfmuseum.org](http://www.sfmuseum.org)). Sutter did have some men in the area of what is now Sutter Creek whipsawing lumber by hand, but he needed much more wood for his ambitious plans. On August 19, 1847, Sutter and John A. Marshall entered into an agreement to construct a saw mill on the American River at a place known to the Indians as "Culloomah."



It was only a matter of months until gold would be discovered at what we now know as Coloma. On January 28, 1848, Marshall met secretly with Sutter to show him what he had discovered at the Coloma saw mill -- gold. Sutter traveled to Coloma the next day and begged his workers to keep the discovery a secret for 6 weeks, but the secret apparently didn't even last two weeks.

Once the secret was out, Sutter's laborers began to desert him, as Sutter put it "from the clerk to the cook" all left to seek their fortunes.

Soon a torrent of people descended on the Mother Lode, beginning slowly in 1848 and building to a torrent the following year. The hopeful adventurers included both travelers from around the world as well as residents of the towns that had been established throughout California. Walter Colton, mayor at Monterey, wrote in his diary: "Many got ready to depart for the mines. The family which kept house for me caught the moving infection. Husband and wife were both packing up. The blacksmith dropped his hammer, the carpenter his plane, the mason his trowel, the farmer his sickle, the baker his loaf."

In the spring of 1849, the non-Indian population of California was about 14,000. This grew to nearly 100,000 by the end of 1849, and to more than 250,000 by 1852.

Sutter was understandably upset about the financial losses he suffered; his mills were left incomplete, the newcomers swarmed across his lands.

Sutter, after seeing the gold used to pay the high prices in his store, agreed with his Indian laborers to make a trip to gather gold for themselves, and set off on an expedition with about 100 Indians and 50 Hawaiians. They made camp about ten miles above Mormon Island, on the south fork of the American River.

This quickly became crowded, so Sutter broke up the camp and moved south to Sutter Creek. While the work went well, three or four "traveling grog-shops" moved to the area, and soon Sutter's laborers were showing up unable to work from drinking and gambling the night before. Sutter determined to cut his losses, and returned to Fort Sutter, and made no further attempts to find gold.

Sutter did try, with partners, to become a merchant to all the miners, but after being cheated by his partners, and with creditors hounding his every step, Sutter determined that the only way to avoid losing everything was to deed his land to his son, John Sutter, Jr.

Late in 1849 Sutter sold his fort to Alden Bayly for \$7,000 and moved to Hock Farm, near Yuba City. His home at Hock

Farms was burned to the ground in 1865 by a disgruntled worker. Sutter then decided to seek compensation from the United States Congress for his help in colonizing the State of California. Sutter and his family moved to Pennsylvania in 1871 due to his poor health. Sutter died of heart failure on June 18, 1880, two days after Congress adjourned without passing a bill that would have given Sutter a \$50,000 reimbursement.

**The City of Sutter Creek Survives**

The discovery of a good stand of sugar pine eventually led to the discovery of gold in California. John Sutter had sent men out from his fort looking for lumber, and one group found a stand on a ridge 45 miles east-southeast of the fort between two creeks.

The northerly creek was named after Jose Amador, a wealthy Californian who tried panning for gold there. The southerly creek kept the name that the lumbermen gave it -- Sutter Creek.

Within about 18 months of the start of the California Gold Rush, efforts had moved from panning in streams and rivers to quartz veins, some deep underground. The largest of the veins -- the Mother Lode -- stretched from Oakhurst to Georgetown and produced some \$3.5 billion in gold calculated in today's dollars.

More than 300 mines were working by the 1870-80s, some reaching a mile or more underground. Mining continued until it was shut down in 1942 by an executive order.

Sutter Creek was incorporated in September, 1854. By that time, it had grown into a significant camp, and boasted several restaurants and stores and an impressive hotel. The town was an important supply point for the surrounding mines and mining camps.

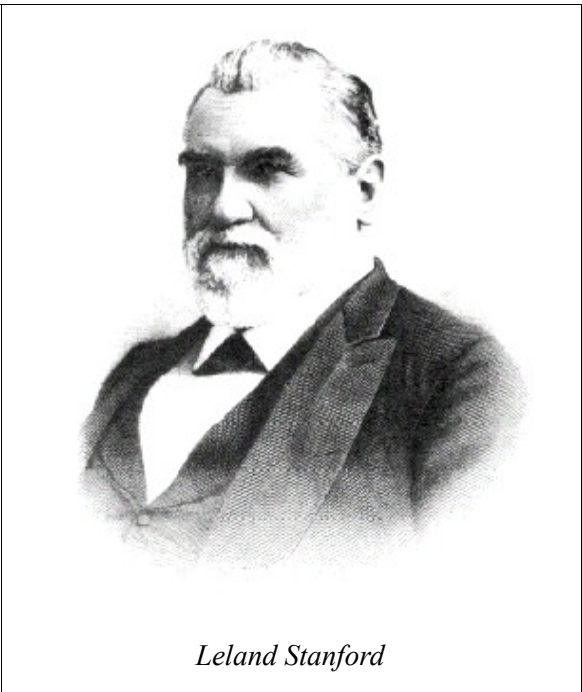
Leland Stanford, founder of Stanford University, was both a one-time resident of Sutter Creek and an investor in the mining operations. Stanford had been paid with an interest in the Union Mine to settle a debt at his grocery in Sacramento, but upon seeing the losses accumulate was determined to sell the mine (renamed the Lincoln by then) for \$5,000.

However, the mine foreman, Robert Downs, talked Stanford into giving the mine one more chance, and it paid off. A rich vein was discovered within the year, and produced \$2.2 million in gold between 1860 and 1873. Stanford sold his interest in the mine for \$400,000, and later went on to partner in the building of the transcontinental railroad. Stanford later became governor of California and a U.S. Senator, as well as the founder of Stanford University.

Other luminaries from early Sutter Creek history included Alvinza Hayward and Hetty Green, both involved in mining operations.

Fires between 1862 and 1888 destroyed much of Sutter Creek, but it was quickly rebuilt each time. Today's Sutter Creek is the legacy of the shopkeepers and business owners who rebuilt buildings in the Victorian and New England styles.

In addition to the historical sites in and around Sutter Creek, the surrounding county holds numerous surprises from Volcano to Amador City. [Click here](#) to visit the Amador County web site where you can read about these cities as well as Buckhorn, Cook's Station, Drytown, Fiddletown, Ham's Station, Lone, Jackson, Kirkwood, Martell, Pine Grove, Pioneer, Plymouth, River Pines and Silver Lake.



*Leland Stanford*

**Sources**

<a href="#">History Net</a>	<a href="#">Math/Science Nucleus</a>	<a href="#">CA history: K-12th grade</a>	<a href="#">California Parks</a>
<a href="#">AT&amp;T Knowledge Network</a>	<a href="#">Berkeley Library</a>	<a href="#">SF Virtual Museum</a>	<a href="#">Yosemite</a>
<a href="#">National Park Service</a>	<a href="#">Native American Studies</a>	<a href="#">Sutter Creek Info</a>	<a href="#">Amador County</a>