California Gold Rush

AUTRY MUSEUM OF THE AMERICAN WEST

Part 1 – In 1848, James Marshall found gold on Sutter's Mill located near Sacramento, California. As news about this discovery traveled around the world, thousands of people from other countries and different parts of the United States came to California looking for gold and work during the California Gold Rush. With approximately 300,000 people moving to California during this time, towns that were once small quickly became *boomtowns*. These boomtowns *overwhelmed* the Mexican American and Native American people who had already been living on the land for years.

Whether traveling to California by walking, *covered wagons*, or boats, people needed to buy food, supplies, and other items once they arrived in these towns. Many new *businesses* started to provide products (items for sale) and services (activities for sale that help others) to the people living in California. A number of the businesses that started during the California Gold Rush, such as Levi's Jeans and Wells Fargo Bank, are still around today. As less and less gold was found, people started leaving these towns. Some boomtowns quickly became *ghost towns*, while others such as San Francisco and Sacramento are still big cities today. In the end, very few gold miners became rich from finding gold. The people who ended up making a lot of money during the California Gold Rush were the people who sold different products and services to the gold miners.

San Francisco, California in November 1849

Glossary

Boomtowns: small towns that grow quickly with lots of people and new businesses

Businesses: the activity of making, buying, or selling goods or providing services for sale

Covered wagons: large wagons with high, bonnet-like canvas tops

Ghost towns: towns where few or no people live

Overwhelmed: overcome by force or numbers

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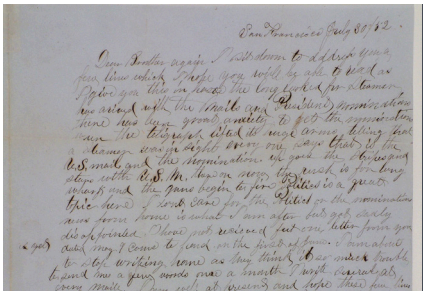
PART 2 – Learn more about some of the different jobs people had during the California Gold Rush by looking at these artifacts from the Autry Museum of the American West on the left-hand side. Artifacts are objects such as tools or documents such as letters from the past. Then read the job descriptions on the right-hand side.

Bakers: Bakers such as Mary Jane Caples made a lot of money during the California Gold Rush. When her husband James got sick, Mary Jane decided to make pies to sell to the hungry gold miners. Apples and peaches were some of the ingredients that could be used to make pies. After baking pies in Dutch ovens (see photograph) or a stove, Mary Jane sold her fruit pies for $1.25 each. Other items that bakers might have used in their work include spoons, pie pans, and ingredients such as flour and spices.

Barbers: Barbers provided a much needed service during the California Gold Rush. Gold miners could have their hair cut and their beards shaved at barbershops. As owner of the Metropolitan Shaving Saloon, Edward P. Duplex had a successful barbershop with other barbers working for him. Other items that barbers might have used during the California Gold Rush include brushes (see photograph), combs, cups, razors, and shaving soap.

Gold Miners: Gold miners looked for gold during the California Gold Rush. Working in icy rivers and high temperatures reaching up to 120 degrees, gold miners like J.D. Borthwick quickly learned that looking for gold was hard work. Many gold miners were disappointed by the amount of time it took to separate the gold, if there was any, from the sand, gravel, and mud that they had collected from the rivers in their gold pans (see photograph).

Launderers: Launderers, people who wash and iron clothes, provided an important service during the California Gold Rush. A launderer named Young Lee Chew learned how to wash and iron clothes from an American woman who paid him $3.50 per week. After two years, Young Lee Chew started his own laundry. Other items that launderers might have used during the California Gold Rush include washboards, soap, and irons (see photograph).



Merchants: Merchants sold supplies during the California Gold Rush. Using animals called mules to carry the supplies, merchants sold items such as building supplies, food, and tools to the gold miners living in mining camps. Charging $2.50 for each letter (see photograph) and $1.50 for each newspaper that usually cost a nickel back East, merchants raised the prices of the items they sold because they knew the gold miners were desperate for food, supplies, tools, and the news.

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PART 3 – Imagine the year is 1849 and you are looking for a job during the California Gold Rush. Choose one of the jobs you learned about on the previous page. Then answer the questions in the chart by writing your answers on a piece of paper or in the space below.

JOB QUESTIONS	ANSWER EXAMPLES	YOUR ANSWERS
What is the name of the job you picked?	Baker Barber Gold miner Launderer Merchant	
How would you describe this job? What types of things will you do?	Responsibilities Prices of things Products sold Services provided	
What will help you do this job? Which animals, supplies, or tools will help you do this job?	Building supplies Dutch ovens Gold pans Mules Razors Washboards Other items	
What types of activities are you good at that will help you do this job?	Cleaning things Finding things Baking things Selling things Shaving beards Other activities	
Why are you the best person for this job? Which words best describe you?	Dependable Experienced Flexible Hardworking Honest Likeable Resourceful Responsible	

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PART 4 – Now that you have picked a California Gold Rush job, you need to let others know that you are available to start working. Make an advertisement or a poster explaining why people should hire you for this job. Create your advertisement using sentence stems on a piece of paper or in the space provided. Include the following information in your advertisement:

- A title that grabs people's attention
- Job name
- Job description
- Animals/supplies/tools you will use
- Types of activities you are good at
- Why you are the best person for the job

Title: _____

I am looking for a job as a _____

The types of things I will do when I am working include _____

_____

_____

_____

Some of the things (animals, supplies, and/or tools) that will help me do this job are

_____

_____

_____

The types of activities that I am good at that will help me do this job include

_____

_____

_____

Some words that describe why I am the best person for this job are

_____

_____

_____

Resources

Images

Lantern slide of a drawing, *San Francisco in November 1849*, San Francisco, California, late 1800s to early 1900s. Autry Museum; LS.2833

Cast iron dutch oven with three legs and a handle, 1800s. Autry Museum; 18.C.118

Shaving brush, made of bone, with hollow cylindrical handle that can also be used to store the brush, mid 1800s. Autry Museum; 90.64.9

Metal pan for mining gold, 1800s. Autry Museum; 85.1.737

Hand iron with half inch-thick soleplate and curved looped handle, circa 1800s. Autry Museum; 94.49.10

Letter from William H. Dales in San Francisco to his brother, dated July 30, 1852. Written on lettersheet entitled, *Miners at Work With Long Toms*, published by Noisy Carriers Publishing Hall, San Franciso, CA. Autry Museum; 94.237.9

Texts

Ketchum, Liza. *The Gold Rush*. Little Brown & Co., 1996.

Lapp, Rudolph M. *Blacks in Gold Rush California*. Vail-Ballou Press, 1977.

Levy, JoAnn. *They Saw the Elephant: Women in the California Gold Rush*. University of Oklahoma Press, 1992.