

Gold Discovery at Reading's Bar and Horsetown

Gold was discovered here on Clear Creek by Major Pierson B. Reading in May of 1848. It was the second major gold discovery in California. Who was Major Reading and how was he here to do that? In the 1840's several men received land grants in what is now California by the Mexican Government. The one best known was John Sutter's 48,000 acre grant in the area of Sacramento. John Sutter played a big role in California history. His fort was self-sufficient; raising livestock, grain, fruits and vegetables. Most white men coming into California in the 1840's would have passed through Sutter's Fort. It was the center of commerce in the day. (Sutter's Fort is now a history museum enjoyed by thousands of visitors each year.)

Major Reading (1816-1868) came overland to California in 1843. He was awarded his own land grant of 26,632 acres which he named Rancho Buena Ventura, meaning *Good Fortune*. It was situated on the west bank of the Sacramento River, between Cottonwood Creek and Salt Creek and was approximately 3 miles wide and 19 miles long.

In 1844, while Reading worked as John Sutter's clerk and trapper, some of Sutter's men exploring to the north and looking for timber came to Battle Creek. They found stands of large timber which they cut and tied into large rafts to float back to Sutter's Fort. (Battle Creek is the home of Coleman Fish Hatchery and they host the Salmon Festival the third Saturday in October.)

Reading and his neighbor William B. Ide actively supported the Bear Flag Republic in 1846. Ide's Adobe was north of Red Bluff. (Ide's Adobe is now a State Park. Visit for Adobe Day the 3rd Saturday in August or the Pioneer Christmas Party the 2nd Saturday in December. On June 14, 1846 two to three dozen Americans captured General Mariano Vallejo at his home in Sonoma. General Vallejo believed Mexico could not maintain control of California and felt the U.S. would be the next best option so he joined the small crew of settlers, mountain men, and explorers. He ceded California by treaty and William B. Ide became the first and only president of the new Bear Flag Republic. On June 23, 1846 John Fremont took command for the U.S. (California became a state in 1850. Shasta County was incorporated as one of the original 27 counties.)

When James Marshall, a millwright, arrived at Sutter's Fort he worked for Sutter and they entered into a partnership to build a saw mill near Coloma on the South Fork of the American River in what's now El Dorado County. In the fall of 1847 construction started on the saw mill. What happened at that saw mill? Yes! James Marshall discovered gold at Sutter's mill on January 24, 1848. What did Sutter ask of his men at the mill? He asked them to keep this discovery secret - he feared all his laborers at the fort would abandon him for the gold fields.

Reading's Rancho Buena Ventura was also to be self-sufficient and he was interested in Sutter's accomplishments. Reading visited his friend Sutter in April 1848 who took him to see the mill where gold had recently been discovered. Reading was an amateur geologist and noted that the geology of the area resembled the geology of Clear Creek near his Rancho. When he returned home he traveled to Clear Creek and in May 1848 he discovered gold here at the mouth of the tall, narrow canyon on what became known as Reading's Bar. Major Reading and approximately 150 Native Americans whom he employed were the first to mine on the bar on Clear Creek in the spring and summer of 1848. They picked gold nuggets up off the ground and put them into baskets to take back to his Adobe. It's indicated they took gold nuggets out by the bucketful, as much as 52 ounces (or \$1000) a day. There are estimates that \$3 Million was taken from Reading's Bar the first year. Reading got the easiest diggings in this area and moved on to mine in Trinity County with even greater success. (Just a note: the Native Americans WERE aware of the gold. They gave it no value as it could not be eaten or made into a tool.)

The "leak" of the news of the gold discovery was actually a calculated one from a couple of merchants in San Francisco who believed they could strike it rich selling supplies and equipment to miners. So, now the rush is on. News spread all over the world and many rushed to California to find their fortunes. I have a copy of the 1850 census page showing my 3rd great grandfather on his claim on the South Fork of the American River. On that one census page there are miners from Germany, France, Kentucky, New York, and Spain.

The location on Clear Creek was the second major gold discovery in California. During 1849 miners came from all directions seeking gold. They came from Oregon, Trinidad, Sacramento and San Francisco, across the plains and around the horn. From San Francisco or Sacramento they could take a river boat to Red Bluff. From the Oregon diggings at Jacksonville, or Trinidad or Red Bluff many walked the rest of the way to the gold fields. For a time, ships were being abandoned in the San Francisco harbor when captain and crew decided they would also head for the gold fields. The canvas sails were removed as they made good tents, and soon made Levi's pants as well. The gold camp which grew up at the discovery site on Clear Creek became known as One Horse Town and later Horsetown.

There are two methods of gold mining, Placer and Hard Rock or Quartz mining. The simplest process is Placer mining where water is an essential component. The gold pan, rocker, long tom and sluice box were early techniques of Placer mining. The gold pan is the simplest, swirling water over sand and gravel and washing away the lighter material, leaving the gold in the bottom of the pan.

Another popular tool was the rocker or cradle which resembled a child's cradle. The rocker is pushed back and forth by a handle while the miner dumps gravel into the top part. Buckets of water helped move fine and heavy particles through a screen. On the bottom were slats, or riffles, that caught the heavier metals. Finally the miner would pan what remained to sort out the heavy ore and gold.

The long tom may have been an 8 – 20 foot rocker. But the long tom was usually more elaborate than, although similar in theory to, the rocker. This system included a paddlewheel to ensure a constant source of water. Again gravel was shoveled into the top end and the water pushed it along a long wooden course, sometimes hundreds of feet long. Again, slats collected the heavier ore, which was then further processed.

Miners often had to bring the water to where the gold was. Many elaborate networks of mining ditches were built throughout the gold country like the Clear Creek Ditch. Remnants of the ditches can be found in the area and some portions are being used today in trail systems.

The early California gold miners realized the more gravel they could process, the more gold they were likely to find. They collaborated to find ways to process larger quantities of gravel more rapidly. As returns from easier diggings dwindled, placer mining was augmented with hydraulic mining, a more intensive form of placer mining. At one point 15 hydraulic nozzles were in constant operation on Horsetown hill and many fortunes were made. Hydraulic mining used high-pressure jets of water to dislodge rock material or move sediment. Water was redirected into an ever-narrowing channel, through a large canvas hose, and out through a giant iron nozzle, called a “monitor”. The extremely high pressure stream washed entire hillsides through enormous sluices removing the gold. (You can see a large hydraulic monitor from the LeGrange Mine west of Weaverville on Highway 299. Stop to read the story which includes photos.)

Hydraulic mining became the largest-scale, and most devastating, form of placer mining. Mining sediment from hydraulic mining clogged the Sacramento River and buried vast areas of farmland in the Sacramento Valley. Steamers ran aground and farmers demanded an end to hydraulic mining. They filed suit against the mining companies and the United States District Court in San Francisco declared that hydraulic mining was “a public and private nuisance” in 1884. Its operation in “areas tributary to navigable streams and rivers” was outlawed. Remember, the Sacramento River was navigable in the 1840’s.

Dredging reached the ultimate in brute mechanics, sorting tons of material through screens. This method was also very destructive to the environment. The site of Horsetown itself was destroyed, turned upside down by a floating gold dredge that worked the area from 1905 to 1915. The company recovered enough gold in the first two weeks to pay for the \$140,000 dredge.

While hydraulic mining was at its height, small-scale placer mining had largely exhausted the rich surface placers, and the mining industry turned to hard rock or quartz mining which required larger organizations and much more capital. Quartz mining involves locating an underground gold vein. The quartz matrix must be crushed to begin separating the gold from it. Crushing equipment ranged from a simple mule or horse-driven stone arrastra to heavy metal Chile mills, steam-powered stamp mills, and the ball mill. Since the gold was also crushed, it then had to be extracted by various rather

complicated methods, often unpleasant, expensive, and/or toxic. Hard work, more equipment, and more capital are needed to drive tunnels, assay ore, bring it out to a mill, crush it, recover the sometimes microscopic grains of gold, purify, and melt the metal to make ingots.

I noted earlier the impacts on the environment by Hydraulic mining and large dredgers. Another example of mining damaging the environment occurred early in the 20th century. By 1897 copper had become king of our mineral economy and in 1905 the Keswick copper smelter was built. The processes used to separate the copper from other minerals in the day killed all vegetation in the area and trees along the river as far away as Anderson. Complaints came from as far downstream as Chico. Multiple law suits were filed and the courts closed the copper smelters in 1910.

In September 1849 the first group to arrive and explore the Clear Creek Diggings agreed to pitch their tents near the mouth of the canyon and Reading's Bar. They had come by the Lassen Route. When the '49ers arrived they had to put a lot more effort into extracting gold. They built dams to collect water or divert a section of the creek to be able to mine its bed. It was hard work. During October there were 300 – 400 men in the diggings. Not everyone found satisfactory diggings and only 150-200 men spent that winter at Horsetown. The others moved on, spreading out to every gulch and gravel bar on Clear Creek.

Alexander Andrews was one of the early forty-niners who mined at Reading's Bar in the Clear Creek diggings. He was a prominent citizen in Horsetown for many years and built the Horsetown Bridge near Reading's bar. Andrews later wrote that miners considered they were doing well if they made from an ounce (\$18) to \$100 a day. During the wet winter of 1849, they could make \$200 a day. Anything less than an ounce was not considered "pay diggings". It was said that gold could be found in any river, creek or stream.

Horsetown was laid out in town lots and consisted of 36 acres. The 1850 census listed 1,000 individuals in Horsetown. The miners were more successful in the winter months as water was needed to wash out the gold, whether by panning, long tom or sluice box or rocker. They recognized the need to bring water to the gulches and in 1853 Duffy's Ditch brought water to Horsetown. In the same year Nathan Townsend and his partner built a dam with a ditch to supply water for mining. In 1856 Enos Taylor and William Harrison Elmore bought the dam and ditch, selling water.

If water was good, more water was better and in 1855 the Clear Creek Ditch was built. This was quite a construction project in the day; 49 miles long with three major flumes, a 460 foot tunnel in hard rock and a 15 acre earthwork reservoir. The intake for the ditch was near the Tower House, a stage coach stop on the wagon road to Yreka. It first brought water to the Placer Road area diggings – Muletown, Middletown, and Centerville. Laterals were then extended to Horsetown, Texas Springs, and beyond. Sawmills were erected to produce the timbers for the flumes. A 5 acre reservoir was developed at Mary Lake and the 15 acre reservoir west of Grant School is at Montgomery Ranch

Estates. The ditch flowed down the Clear Creek Canyon. In late November 1855 it was complete and supplied dependable water for many years. Its capacity was about 10 cubic feet per second. Miners rushed to stake claims. With lots of dependable water gold production soared and in 1856 the population of Horsetown doubled. (At this time much of the Clear Creek Ditch is under Whiskeytown Lake. Some parts of the ditch are part of the trail system in the Park and on BLM lands downstream.)

Martha Bidwell (Greene) was five years old when her parents, brother and other family left Milwaukee on their way to California. They arrived in California October 10, 1852, coming through the Fremont Pass and part way over the Lassen Trail. They crossed the Sacramento River at the Emigrant Ferry, near the site of the Anderson Free Bridge. They joined relatives and friends at the mining camp of Horsetown prepared to make their fortunes. They rented a two room house just before the winter rains came. The creeks were too high to cross and no bridges existed. Food supplies were short and her father, John H. Bidwell paid \$50 for fifty pounds of flour, \$50 for fifty pounds of corn meal, and \$10 for ten pounds of dried peaches. Gold was more plentiful than food at that time. There was no school at Horsetown so the children were taught by their mother until Mrs. Elmore arrived and started a private school at Texas Springs, a mining town 2-1/2 miles from Horsetown. The Bidwell children walked to school and back each day. In 1856 E. L. Apperon taught school in Horsetown.

In 1852 Father Florian built a wood frame church in Horsetown (which was destroyed by fire in 1868). The first telegraph and Wells Fargo Express office in the county were at Horsetown. By the mid fifties Horsetown had board sidewalks on Main Street (its only street), two brick buildings and a lumber yard. There were two hotels, the Union and Spencer's which had a concert hall on the second floor. A. T. Corbus & Co. and Wm. Weil & Co. were among several mercantile stores. There was a bakery, three butchers, restaurants and many boarding houses in Horsetown. There were two blacksmiths and a livery stable and F. B. Chandler ran the Horsetown & Shasta Express, via Middletown in 1858. A Masonic Lodge (the Clinton Lodge # 119) was established in 1857 and miners enjoyed a tenpin alley also. And of course, fourteen salons including Duffy's Exchange which served choice liquors and cigars. James Hart started a newspaper, the Northern Argus, which he printed from 1860 – 1863.

There was just one street though Horsetown, the main Shasta-Horsetown-Igo road. On the north side of the street the houses were set near the hills, their back yards almost at the foot of the slope. The Coughlin house was on the north side of the street and there were catalpas and many other shade trees, shrubs and flowers in their garden. There were also the homes of Mr. Dixon, the Boyd's, and the big Gleason house.

Going back to October of 1849, I said there were 300-400 men in the diggings at Horsetown. Half of them wintered there and the other half spread out to every gulch and gravel bar on Clear Creek. This produced settlements nearby called Texas springs, Middletown, Muletown, Centerville, Jackass Flat, Shasta Gulch, Buljin Gulch, Igo, Piety Hill and Briggsville. A little further north mining camps were

established at Reading Springs (known as Shasta) and Lower Springs, Whiskey Creek, Oak Bottom, and French Gulch. Goods were shipped by boat to Red Bluff and hauled in wagons to Horsetown and Shasta.

Benjamin Swasey arrived in the area of Lower Springs and Reading Springs in 1849. He was one of the first pioneers to arrive in Shasta, coming around the Horn among the first Argonauts. He established a mercantile business, the Swasey Hotel and he engaged in mining. Swasey also planted fruit trees. His peaches and pears were delivered by pack mule to miners along the route to Yreka as well as to nearby settlements. He planted two large palm trees before the foundation of the Swasey Hotel. When the Capitol was built in Sacramento, the state legislature appropriated \$600 for transplanting them and moving them to the Capitol grounds. Mr. Swasey would not let them go.

The Shasta Courier advertised "A Ball will be given at Swasey's Hotel, Lower Springs, Shasta County on the evening of the 18th of January." The Committee of Arrangements included gentlemen from Shasta, Horsetown, Whiskey Creek, Tehama and Red Bluffs.

There were four spring creeks in the vicinity of Reading Springs; Rock Creek, Salt Creek, Middle Creek, and Spring Creek. The mining center of Shasta developed at Reading Springs. Lower Springs, Shasta, and Horsetown were the first three important settlements in Shasta County. They all contended to be the county seat when it was moved from Reading's Rancho Buena Ventura. Shasta was the natural place to load and dispatch pack trains to distant diggings and was therefore selected as the county seat in early 1851. It became the terminus of travel from Sacramento and of the pack trails from Scott Valley and Klamath River mines. For many years the most frequently used route to Oregon from the mining fields was through French Gulch; to Callahan's, Yreka, and the Klamath River Diggings.

Shasta became the hub of transportation around the camps and bustled with activity. Throughout the early 1850's as many as 100 freight teams and 2,000 pack mules went through Shasta on a daily basis going to and from the gold camps. In 1851 at least 6,000 transients were in and around Shasta. Eventually Shasta became the larger and more dominant gold rush center, the center for commerce and government. In 1852 a fire destroyed the business section of Shasta and the merchants rebuilt in brick. In 1853 gold shipments out of Shasta averaged \$100,000 a week or \$5.2 million for the year. As you drive through our State Park of Shasta you see the remains of some of these buildings. The Courthouse and jail have been converted to a museum and the Mason's Lodge next door is still in use in the building they occupied in 1854. The Western Star Lodge #98 was the first Masonic Lodge chartered and holding meetings in California. (The Mason's serve breakfast on the second Saturday of the month. Stop by and enjoy breakfast sometime in the same surroundings where the 49er's once dined.)

The gold *RUSH* went to about 1860 although some people still mined and found gold and still do. Fire destroyed most of Horsetown in 1868, but the town was already in decay. The railroad arrived and

the new town of Redding was laid out in 1872. Redding replaced Shasta as the hub of transportation and many of the merchants of Shasta opened new businesses in Redding. By the late 1870's the miners were just subsisting and began leaving the gold fields for other opportunities in Redding. Eventually the County seat was moved to Redding also.

The Horsetown Bridge, built by Alexander Andrews of Horsetown, fell into the creek sometime in the early 1890's. Maybe due to the population shift, Placer Road was extended from Redding to Igo with a new bridge farther up Clear Creek. At a later time, the Four-Mile Bar Bridge was built, possibly at the same location as the earlier Horsetown Bridge.

Remember the dam with a ditch that Nathan Townsend and his partner built in 1853 to supply water for mining? It was purchased in 1856 by Taylor and Elmore. Their heirs sold their holdings to McCormick-Saeltzer Company in 1875. About 1908 R. M. Saeltzer rebuilt the dam, raising its height considerably. This brought complaints from citizens of Horsetown, Igo, Shasta, Whiskeytown, Tower House and all the way to French Gulch, as salmon were unable to pass Saeltzer's dam. Saeltzer dam was removed in 2000 providing additional spawning area for endangered Salmon in Clear Creek. The fish regained a stretch of creek from the old dam site to Whiskeytown dam which was built in the 1960's. Contracts with the Bureau of Reclamation allow extra flows from Whiskeytown dam to maintain water temperatures at healthy levels for the fish and occasional high event flows to help flush out the creek system. In addition, gravel is injected into the creek at several locations for spawning as the dam prevents gravels from coming down the creek naturally.

In 1931 the towns of Muletown, Centerville, and Middletown enjoyed a brief flurry when a rich vein of gold was struck at the old Yankee John Mine. My grandmother was born at the home at the Yankee John Mine in 1915 while her father worked the Yankee John Mine. The Yankee John was first dug in 1858 and was worked as late as the 1960's. One of its two shafts was 320' deep. The other was 80'.

Early in the Gold Rush white women and children were not found in the gold camps. Some of the miners, as the trappers did before them, took Native American women as their wives or concubines. Just the privilege of gazing upon a white woman commanded cold hard gold dust. I read an account of a miner whose wife was the first in the area and he collected gold from the other miners who were allowed to gaze at her standing on her front porch from a distance. There were many unusual opportunities for women in the cities and the gold fields as men, starved for female company, paid extravagant fees to associate with women or buy products that were made by women. Women made more money selling homemade pies, biscuits, doughnuts, etc. than their husbands made mining. Restaurants, lodging, laundries, mending, and waiting tables, all paid good wages.

In April 1852 legislation authorized married women to transact business in their own name as Sole Traders. An early sole trader was Margaret Mullen on Olney Creek who in 1853 kept a "public hotel

or eating house". Elizabeth Moody in April 1854 carried on the business of a farmer and rancher. Mary Brown conducted a "Shaving and Hair dressing business". One of the most original occupations chosen by a female Sole Trader was that of Debora Clough. She operated a lime kiln at Briggsville, four miles from Horsetown, in 1858. The limestone was burned to make slaked lime for mortar which was needed to construct brick buildings. Her husband was a brick mason. Typically a wife's business was supportive of her husband's occupation. The women would help operate the farm or ranch, or operate a boarding house, restaurant or such. My third great grandmother, Caroline Diestelhorst, was in mining. The Act was to prevent suit being brought against a man for his wife's business debts, while at the same time setting a limit on the amount of community property that could be invested in the wife's business. It prevented a husband from putting all property in his wife's name and then taking bankruptcy to avoid paying his own creditors. It was not an "equal rights" act. It was sixty years later that women got the right to vote.

The Chinese played a role in the gold rush also. Shasta had one of the largest Chinese populations in the state in 1853. There was a lot of animosity towards the Chinese by the White miners. Their customs were very different, as well as their foods and religion. The Chinese typically kept to themselves and Chinatowns existed on the outskirts of many mining camps. On February 5, 1859 the miners held a meeting at Shasta to prevent the Chinese from any further mining. They were removed from Horsetown, Middletown, Shasta and vicinity. In 1886 they were forced out of Redding and the Chinatown mysteriously burned that night. Sometime in the 1880's Chinese were banned from Shasta County entirely. Shasta's Chinatown had a Chinese temple, called a Joss House. One of the finest Joss Houses was built in Weaverville. (The Weaverville Joss House is part of a State Park. It's a must see, but open on a limited basis.)

I'll share some interesting facts with you:

In 1851, a 56 oz. gold nugget was found in Whiskey Creek.

In 1870, a 184.5 oz. gold nugget was found on Spring Creek near the Iron Mountain Railway crossing. In 1880, another even larger than the first was found about 100 ft. away. I frequently bicycle right by that spot, just north of the Rock Creek trailhead at Iron Mountain Road, but I haven't seen any gold.

In 1878 a 13 oz. crystallized chunk of gold was taken from the Mad Mule Mine and exhibited at the Paris Exposition the same year. It was the largest piece of unworked native gold in the exposition and it won 1st place as finest gold exhibited there.

In the 1890's a 2 lb. gold nugget was found on a claim in the Flat Creek Mining District.

In 1912 a 19½ oz. nugget was found in Mad Mule Canyon.

These are only a few of the tales about large nuggets, but I think you're getting the point. Right? We're coming to the good part

In 1853 gold shipments out of Shasta averaged \$100,000 a week or \$5.2 million for the year. I want to put this into perspective for you. In 1853 the price of gold was \$18.93 per ounce. In the spring of 2013 the price of gold was \$1,764.61 per ounce. I divided \$100,000 by the 1853 gold price to determine how many ounces were in the shipment (5,282.62) and multiplied that by the gold price now to determine the value of each week's shipment in today's dollars exceeds \$ 9.3 million. Each and every week of the year totals \$483 million for the year. WOW!!

The stories and information above were compiled by Cathy Scott, mostly from the Shasta Historical Society's annual publications of the Covered Wagon. I want to acknowledge and thank the Historical Society. They maintain an index for several decades of the Covered Wagon which can be found at the Historical Society or the Redding Library.