

SO YOU THINK YOU  
KNOW THE  
GOLDEN STATE?

A Story of  
Northern California  
Told in  
100 Buildings

DOUG GELBERT



CRUDEN BAY BOOKS

**SO YOU THINK YOU KNOW THE GOLDEN STATE?  
A STORY OF NORTHERN CALIFORNIA TOLD IN 100 BUILDINGS**

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# INTRODUCTION

If those walls could talk...this is what they would say. A story about Northern California.

Sardines... Spanish missions... counterculture... trolley parks... Eichler Homes... kissing bridges... Santa Rosa plums... Russian colonization... crime and punishment... camels... lawn bowling... Hetch Hetchy... skiing... blimps... landfills... fire lookouts... big trees... Japanese internment camps... octagon houses... Carnegie libraries... post office murals... Googie architecture... Bear Flag Revolt. This book will have you telling stories like a native in no time.

The photos and stories collected here are a fast and fun way to learn the explanations behind the quirks, the traditions and the secrets that make Northern California uniquely California. Why did California's first railroad use a gauge seen nowhere else? Solved. Where was the largest ship ever constructed on the West Coast built? A mystery no more. Where was the U.S. Hickory Open contested in Northern California? Identified. Where is the world's first reinforced concrete bridge? Revealed.

Imagine a group of settlers arriving in an undeveloped location. First come shelters in which to live and then structures in which to work and shop. There are buildings for worship and education. As the community grows government buildings are required. With prosperity comes places in which to spend leisure time. And each step along the way builds a story only Northern California can call its own. A story told in 100 buildings. Almost all of the selections within are open to the public, or at least visible from public spaces. So, if you haven't seen these landmarks in person, fire up your GPS and get out and see the story of the Golden State standing in plain sight on Northern California streets!

# Tuluwat Island

Eureka  
prehistoric



Shell middens are found in only a few countries and mostly in America in the Southeast where oyster shells have been carbon-dated to 3,000 years ago. The purpose of their construction is still a bit of a mystery. Middens are assumed to be a refuse heap but why keep piling so high? The shell midden on Tuluwat Island covers six acres and is built 14 feet above the shore - high enough to be seen from the mainland. The creators of the midden were the Wiyot peoples who used the island as a spiritual center. Each year the members of the tribe would gather for a World Renewal Ceremony. Knowing that in 1860, a group of white settlers waited for the men to leave the island to get provisions for the celebration and massacred nearly 100 women and children, using clubs so as not to issue the report of rifles. The destruction of the Tuluwat Village led to the building of a dry dock and boat repair yard which operated for more than a century. After it closed the island has been systematically returned to the Wiyot Tribe by the City of Eureka, including the 4.5 acres remaining of the shell midden, now a National Historic Landmark.

# Mission San Carlos

## Carmel

### 1770



The Spanish mission system set up in California in 1769 was a masterclass in colonial bureaucracy. The missions would be established by Catholic priests accompanied by civilian settlers and military personnel to create settlements strung along the Pacific Ocean and knitted together overland for 600 miles by road known as the Cami-

no Real. Before a mission could become a reality a priest needed to wade through months of paperwork at every level of Spanish government. The desired site needed to have an ample supply of fresh water, abundant timber, and terrain favorable for growing crops. There would eventually be 21 missions which account for most of California's oldest structures. Mission San Carlos was the second built by the Franciscans and beginning in 1797 operated as the headquarters for all the Alto California missions. In 1833, after a dozen years of Mexican rule, all the Spanish missions were secularized and most of their extensive lands sold off to the highest bidder. When the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo settled the Mexican American War in 1848 the winning United States honored the church's claim to return mission buildings. San Carlos was in ruins but managed to limp on through the years. In 1931 Harry Downie was on his way to open a cabinet shop in Santa Barbara when he took a job restoring statues at the Carmel mission. He never left. For the next 50 years Downie pored over Spanish source material and scoured the state for period artifacts. Downie left the most authentic representative of the historic California Missions, built around the only original bell and tower in the state.

# Presidio of San Francisco

## San Francisco

### 1776



The Presidio of San Francisco was the third and northernmost of the defensive positions established by the Spanish after colonization of Alta California began in 1769. The strategic position south of the entrance to San Francisco Bay was never heavily garrisoned until it came under United States control in the Mexican-American War. The military got busy and The Presidio would be at the center of American involvement in every conflict in the Pacific Rim for the next 150 years. This was the headquarters of the Western Defense Command during World War II and men were deployed for Operation Desert Storm in the 1991 Gulf War. All the while underneath the military activity sat some of the most jaw-droppingly beautiful and valuable land in the country. When the base closed in 1996 an auction loomed but Congress stepped in and established the Presidio Trust to protect 800 buildings, the historic Crissy Field airstrip, and much more. While operating as a recreational paradise for the public the Presidio also maintains a unique residential and commercial leasing operation of the facility.

# Royal Presidio Chapel

Monterey

1794



Spanish explorers had been poking around the Pacific Coast from Mexico for the better part of 250 years before Governor Don Gaspar de Portola stood on a hill in San Diego on July 1, 1769 and claimed "Alta California" for Spain. To protect its new territory the Spanish set out to construct four presidios - the first in San Diego, then Monterey, San Francisco and San-

ta Barbara. Spain and its New World rival England approached colonization differently - where the British saw people already living on the land as impediments to be removed the Spanish considered the indigenous people as potential Catholic converts and eventually citizens - once the appropriate religious and cultural values were absorbed, of course. And also an invaluable labor force. Master stonemason Manuel Ruiz directed his Indian crews to create this ornate replacement for a wooden chapel that had started the Presidio of Monterey in 1770. When Spanish rule ended after barely 50 years in 1821 the Presidio was abandoned and only the finely crafted chapel stood. Two centuries later the Chapel is a rare souvenir of 18th century Spanish architecture and the finest of all Spanish-created religious buildings in California.

# Rotchev House

Fort Ross

1812



While French and English fur trappers were penetrating the interior of North America in the 18th century Russian trappers were colonizing the western edge of the continent after Vitus Bering demonstrated it was possible to reach the Pacific Ocean through northern Arctic

waters in 1725. There were a score of Russian settlements in the territory claimed in Alaska and several in Hawaii. In 1812 Fort Ross was established in an uninhabited patch of Mexican territory on the Alta California coast as an agricultural community to supply food to the other Pacific outposts. The Russians introduced windmills and ship-building to California; their houses were the first to be constructed entirely of wood and their glass windows had never been seen in Alta California. By the 1830s the Mexican authorities were becoming wary of the Russian presence and granted land to Swiss immigrant-turned Mexican citizen, John Sutter, to counterbalance "hunting and trading companies from the Columbia River." However by this time the supply of otters was proving not to be inexhaustible and Russia was being consumed with troubles at home on the Crimean Peninsula. Fort Ross was sold to Sutter, now an American, in 1849 for \$19,788 in "notes and gold" and soon would sell its Alaska claims to the United States for \$7.2 million. Fort Ross, the only settlement ever built by Russia in California, is now a state historic park; all the buildings are reconstructions save for the redwood plank house that was the quarters of the commandant. Last occupied by Alexander Rotchev, it is one of only a handful of Russian-built structures in the country.



# Custom House

Monterey

1827



The first European to visit Monterey Bay was Spanish explorer Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo in 1542 but there was no hurry to come ashore. It was not until 1770 that the Royal Presidio of Monterey was established and six years later the base became the first capital of both Baja (lower) and Alta (upper) California. Isolated Monterey did not learn about Mexico's independence from Spain until 1822, nearly a year after the fact. Authorities wasted no time switching allegiances and one of the first things the new Mexicans did was open the borders to trade, which Spain had prohibited. Collecting duties on goods was the primary way a territory could fund itself and the Custom House became the first government building in California. Monterey was transforming into a cosmopolitan outpost with ships arriving from America, South America, England and Asia. The United States even set up a consulate, the only one in Alta California. After the Mexican-American War the Stars and Stripes flew for the first time in California over the Custom House. The 1849 Constitution, however, set the first state capital up the coast in San Jose and for the first time Monterey was not a capital city. The Custom House continued to collect taxes until 1868 when the government sold it for private use. Gone, but not forgotten. After the building was abandoned and left to deteriorate the Native Sons of the Golden West targeted it as one of the first conservation projects on the Pacific Coast. After a restoration the Custom House became a museum and the first ever California State Landmark.

# Rancho Petaluma

Petaluma

1834



The Spanish began the policy of populating Alta California via land grants. Grants could only be made by the Spanish Crown, however, and title was never included. With Mexican independence the policy changed to give grantees legal title to the land. In 1833 the mission

lands set up by Spain were secularized and an additional 8,000,000 acres needed to be transferred into the private hands. Grants became vast and none larger than Rancho Petaluma. Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, the commander of the Presidio of San Francisco, picked up 66,000 acres and set out to build a combination living quarters and command center for his ranching operations. The Petaluma Adobe would be the largest adobe building ever constructed in California and was not completely finished after ten years when the Mexican-American War erupted. Vallejo was not overly concerned by being on the losing side and enthusiastically persuaded fellow rancheros to embrace American rule. He participated in the California Constitutional Convention and served in the first term of the State Senate in 1850. Meanwhile, his vast land holdings were dissipating. When the newly formed Land Commission met to adjudicate who owned what they faced a pile of 813 land claims. Many would wind through the courts for years. Vallejo sold what he could of Rancho Petaluma in 1857 and lived out the final 33 years of his life at his estate in Sonoma, a town he had laid out in 1835. Petaluma Adobe is now a National Historic Landmark interpreting the era of the Mexican rancheros.

# Castro House

## San Juan Batista

### 1838



The José Castro House is one of the best examples of Monterey-styled architecture, a California original blended from Spanish colonial adobe influences and wood frame New England houses. Castro was as powerful a man as could be found in Alta California, serving at various times as governor and commanding general of the Mexican territory, although he harbored California self-rule sentiments above all else. Castro commanded the losing California forces during the Mexican-American War, costing Mexico the northern part of the territory. The well-respected general was then put in charge of the remaining southern section under Mexican control, Baja California. Showing there was no ill will, he offered his fine home to Patrick Breen, the first English-speaking Americans to settle in the area, to live in until he had the money to buy the property. The Breens were twice blessed - the family were survivors of the disastrous Donner Party that lost three dozen members crossing the Sierra Nevadas. Fortune smiled yet again on the family when a Breen son struck it rich in the gold fields, earning enough money to buy the house from Castro in 1854. The Greens stayed until 1935 before selling to the State for the San Juan Bautista State Historical Park.

# Sutter's Fort

## Sacramento

### 1843



John Sutter was one of California's earliest settlers and the Golden State may not have produced a more confounding character since. Was he a swindler or a dreadful businessman? Was he a dreamer or a schemer? Was he a manipulator or a bumbler? John Suter emigrated from Switzerland with the most American trait of all - the idea that he could reinvent himself, starting with his name. His main motivation for sailing for the United States in 1834, leaving his family, was to put an ocean between himself and a posse of debt collectors. Sutter dreamed of an agricultural utopia in the West but got sidetracked and wound up in Hawaii and Alaska first. When he finally arrived in California he had ten Sandwich Island natives in tow. Sutter talked his way into a land grant inland, arguing that there were only indigenous people living there. To increase his holdings Sutter took out Mexican citizenship and eventually garnered 300 square miles. With his Hawaiian work force and local Nisenan Indians he constructed Sutter's Fort that became a destination for emigrants on the California Trail. His ranch and farm were filling Sutter's coffers when gold was discovered on his property. Instead of managing the strike Sutter was overwhelmed with land grabbers and was cheated out of most of his property. Soon he was again swamped with debt and his frontier outpost lay in ruins. John Sutter would die 2,500 miles away in Lititz, Pennsylvania in 1880, leaving no money and a complicated legacy. A decade later his frontier fort was resurrected, destined to live on as an historic park.

# Sonoma Plaza

Sonoma

1846



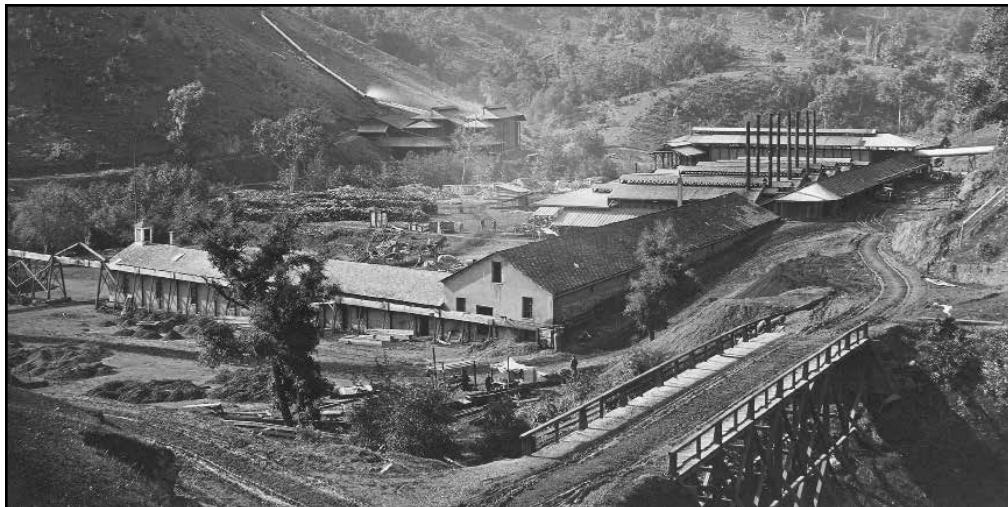
In the years following Mexican independence in 1821 the new country's leaders had more pressing concerns than Alta California, nearly a thousand miles away. To encourage settlement generous land grants were given to Mexican citizens and for Europeans and Americans looking for land the process

of becoming said citizens was little more than filling out a form or two. This loose arrangement worked well enough for everyone involved until messiness with Texas beginning in 1835 forced Mexican officials to cracked down on non-citizen land grants. With miscommunication rampant, a contingent of about 20 American settlers - maybe with the blessing of U.S. Army Captain John C. Fremont and maybe not - set out on June 14, 1846 to raid horses in the town of Sonoma, home of Commandant General Mariano Vallejo. The town was not garrisoned and the general, who actually favored American rule, even invited the insurgents into his home for wine and a meal. Nonetheless, he was led away to prison at Sutter's Fort where he remained for several weeks. The new overlords needed to raise a flag in Sonoma Plaza so they quickly fashioned a flag with a squat grizzly bear - that appeared more like a pig to those looking up at it - and the grand proclamation of Republic of California. The incident became known as the Bear Flag Revolt but was quickly subsumed in the invasion of Mexico by the United States Army to kickstart the Mexican-American War. The grizzly bear, however, survived to eventually become the official state flag in 1911.

# New Almaden

San Jose

1847



The first mining operations in California were not for gold but for mercury. The Ohlone Indians had long used crimson rocks to produce bright body paint but in 1845 Andreas Castillero, a Mexican Army captain trained in metallurgy, recognized the red rocks as cinnabar that could be heated and cooled into quicksilver. Castillero didn't have the resources to properly mine the ore but sold his shares in the land to the English firm of Barron, Forbes, & Company that could. They named the mine New Almaden after the famous mercury mine in Spain. New Almaden would be the largest quicksilver producer after its namesake. There were only so many uses for mercury in the 19th century beyond folk medicines but one of those just happened to be as a gold reducer - handy in the days to come. The New Almaden Mine would go on to generate \$70 million worth of mercury - far more than any California gold mine. The towns supporting the mines spread out along the surrounding ridges, housing hundreds of Mexican and Chilean and Spanish miners. The discovery of cyanide as a way to reduce gold ore in 1887 led to a slow decline until the mine shut down in the early 20th century. California's single most lucrative mine became a National Historic Landmark district and a county park with many buildings open for exploration.

# Benicia Arsenal

Benicia

1849



Predating California statehood, Benicia was selected as the site for the go-to Army supply base for all West Coast operations, a duty it served until 1964. Today Benicia is one of the most intact historical sites in the Golden State. Included in that roster of original buildings are the Camel Barns, constructed in 1855. The idea of using camels in the inhospitable lands of the southwest first percolated in the 1830s. "They will go without

water, and with but little food, for six or eight days, or it is said even longer. Their feet are alike well suited for traversing grassy or sandy plains, or rough, rocky hills and paths, and they require no shoeing..." wrote Lieutenant George Crossman cheerily in a report. The War Department ignored the suggestion until 1853 when Congress appropriated enough money to fund two expeditions to the Mediterranean and return with 70 healthy animals. The camels performed well in tests and on June 25, 1857 a platoon of 25 of the "Camel Corps" set out for Arizona to build a wagon road. The regal "ships of the desert" outperformed their equine counterparts, eating little forage and feasting on desert scrub plants instead. Of course, the camels needed little of the expedition's water. The field reports praised their docility. The military camel experiments disappeared with more pressing matters during the Civil War. With the war won the previous successes were forgotten and the camels sold off, fetching less than \$50 a beast. For many years they could be seen in circuses or maybe working as pack animals. Some were released to fend for themselves in the desert. The last of the original Camel Corps, Topsy, was said to have died in the Griffith Park zoo in Los Angeles in 1934.

# Alcatraz Island

## San Francisco

### 1850



Alcatraz Island is best known as a federal prison designed to hold “the worst of the worst” of American criminals, depicted in scores and scores of movies, television shows and video games. The Alcatraz Island Prison, closed since 1963 and open for only 30 years, is the reason more than one million tourists visit each year. Yet its time as a federal penitentiary may be the least historically influential period of the existence of “the Island

of the Pelicans.” Alcatraz was the site of the first American land dispute in the Golden State. Military Governor John C. Fremont bought the island for \$5,000 for the United States in 1846 and after winning the Mexican-American War the government declared the island a military reservation. Fremont expected a handsome compensation but received nothing and spent the rest of his life in court trying to get his money back. In 1854 the first lighthouse on the West Coast was erected on Alcatraz Island. The bay’s cold, strong currents made Alcatraz an ideal location for detention of soldiers convicted of crimes. Later, captured Confederate soldiers, private citizens accused of treason, and Indians joined the ranks of the confined. In 1907 Alcatraz was anointed the official Western U.S. Military Prison. The stint as America’s first maximum-security, minimum-privilege jail began in 1934 and ended when operating costs soared to almost triple the national average. In 1969 college students calling themselves the United Indians of All Tribes occupied Alcatraz for perhaps the most impactful 19 months of the island’s history. Their protest helped usher in a new government policy of tribal self-determination, signed by President Richard Nixon.



# Fort Mason

## San Francisco

### 1851



For the first 150 years after the United States gained control of San Francisco the government took all the best harbor locations for defensive fortifications. But Confederate gunboats never showed up and Japanese armadas didn't mass outside the Golden Gate. So many of those military installations have closed and the "to-die-for" views have been turned back to the public in the form of parks. Fort Mason is a case in point. The hilltop promontory at San Jose Point affords sweeping views of the bay - the perfect spot for cannons yesterday and Instagram today. For most of its 20th century history Fort Mason was a storage and transportation hub for the nation's Pacific operations; 2/3 of all American troops and half the military cargo filtered through Fort Mason. These days the grounds are more the purview of food trucks than troop carriers. Fort Mason has been recognized as a pioneer in the transformation of military bases; many of the buildings house the Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture with galleries, museums and theaters. The army mess hall has been replaced by communal restaurants and beer halls with million-dollar views.

# Big Four Building

## Sacramento

### 1852



Leland Stanford was 37 years old and oversaw a successful import and export business. Collis Huntington, 40, and Mark Hopkins, 48, ran a thriving hardware business. Charles Crocker, aged 39, was a financier.

These were the men engineer Theodore Judah convinced to form the Central Pacific Railroad that would construct the Transcontinental Railroad, meeting up the Union Pacific building out from Omaha, Nebraska. As per the Pacific Railway Act of 1862 each company would receive 6,400 acres of land and \$48,000 in government bonds for each mile of track laid. None of the Sacramento merchants had any experience with railroads, engineering, or construction. In fact Judah was planning on buying out the "Associates" but contracted yellow fever on his way across Panama and died. He had been heading for New York City to arrange alternate financing. The hardware store became the command center for the Central Pacific. Stanford, who became governor of California in 1862, handled the company political interests in the West; Huntington spent his time in the East courting politicians and money men; Crocker was in charge of construction; Hopkins ("he knew how to squeeze 106 cents out of every dollar") was Treasurer. The Transcontinental Railroad, considered an impossible dream a decade before, was completed in 1869. Each of the Central Pacific directors, known to history as "The Big Four," entered the pantheon of America's richest men. By then the company offices had moved to San Francisco. Huntington & Hopkins Hardware continued to operate into the 1900s but eventually the building fell into disrepair. After being recognized as a national Historic Landmark the sagging structure was revived to become a centerpiece of Old Town Sacramento.

# Pony Express Terminal

## Sacramento

### 1852



No event of less consequence has been more romanticized in American history than the Pony Express. Or maybe the image of a lone rider, with nothing to guide him but his guts and guile, racing across 2000 miles of empty country solely in pursuit of commerce is the ultimate American symbol.

Time is always money and in the mid-19th century overland delivery of mail from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean required 24 days minimum. William Russell, Alexander Majors, and William Wadell had wrapped up most of that delivery of freight to U.S. Army outposts but they believed a satchel of mail could make the trip in just 10 days with a horse shuttle. The men bought a herd of 400 horses and built 184 way stations between St. Joseph, Missouri and Sacramento. They began recruiting lightweight riders, offering \$125 a month in pay when a good day's work might bring only a dollar. The first letters went out on April 3, 1860 and indeed reached Sacramento in the terminal in Hastings Bank 10 days later. In 18 months, however, the Pony Express was kaput, done in by the arrival of the telegraph and financial losses. At a time when U.S. postage was two cents the Pony Express started by charging \$5.00 a letter. The price eventually fell to \$1.00 but the operators could never make the numbers work. Still only one mail pouch was ever lost and only four riders were ever documented to have lost their lives - to Indian attacks - on the job. It was actually more dangerous to work alone in one of the remote express stations. The mythmaking began almost immediately and the Pony Express has been celebrated in movies and television and novels; the route through eight states has been designated a National Historic Trail.

# United States Mint

## San Francisco

### 1854



On a lazy Sunday in 1799 Conrad Reed played hooky from church and went down to splash in Little Meadow Creek on the family farm in North Carolina. That day young Conrad found a shiny yellow rock and brought it home. Purported to weigh 17 pounds, for several years it served as a doorstop in the Reed house until a local jeweler recognized the rock as gold. America's first gold rush was on. By 1824 John Reed had collected an estimated \$100,000 worth of gold from his creek.

The government opened its first branch of the main U.S. Mint in Philadelphia to process the ore into coins in 1838. Gold fever struck again that year in Dahlonega, Georgia and another branch was built. So the U.S. Treasury was old hands at this gold rush business when word came of strikes in California. But America had never seen anything like this - \$4 million dollars in gold coins were minted in San Francisco in the first year. That was about four times as much as the Charlotte Mint coined in its 23-year history. Almost immediately a new building was on the drawing board. A block-swallowing Greek temple came online in 1874 and put in six decades of service before it too was replaced. All three San Francisco branches of the United States Mint still stand.

# Mare Island Navy Yard

Vallejo

1854



Thanks to his father, David Glasgow Farragut signed on as a midshipman in the U.S. Navy at the age of nine. Two years later he was fighting in the War of 1812. The next 40 years of Farragut's naval career were relatively mundane until

he received the assignment in 1854 to oversee construction of the first American naval base on the Pacific Coast. Captain Farragut officially commissioned Mare Island on July 16, 1858. Shortly thereafter Farragut was in the Civil War where his heroics on the Mississippi River and Mobile Bay propelled him to become the first Admiral in United States history. Mare Island's star was on the rise as well. The USS *Saginaw*, a paddle-wheel gunboat, was launched on March 3, 1859, the first of over 500 ships birthed in the shipyard. In 1872 work was begun on the first dry dock in the West. It would take 19 years and countless granite blocks to complete but Dry Dock 1 remains one of the most impressive feats of stone masonry ever attempted. Mare Island was now the premier repair depot for the Navy on the Pacific Coast; if it could float it could be handled in Vallejo. Wartime production was a Mare Island specialty. The USS *Ward*, a destroyer, was built in a record 17 1/2 days during World War I; she would go on to fire the first American shots of World War II when sinking a Japanese midget sub in the early morning hours of December 7, 1941. In 1919 the battleship USS *California* slid into the Mare Island waters as the largest ship ever constructed on the West Coast. During World War II some 46,000 civilian and military personnel worked at Mare Island making crucial repairs on battle-damaged ships. After the war, Mare Island converted to submarines, producing 17 nuclear-powered submarines. The naval yard shuttered in 1996 after 142 years, shifting to a future civilian life.

# Empire Mine

## Grass Valley

### 1854



The gold that triggered the California Gold Rush was placer gold, deposits in the sand and gravel of stream beds. It did not take long for this "easy gold" to play out. What followed was hard rock mining - men lowered in buckets through shafts to drill holes and blast rock into ore cars with black powder. Prospectors fresh off the stagecoaches were not fit for this kind of work - experienced miners needed to be imported. After gold-bearing quartz was found in the Grass Valley Cornishmen from England were brought to the Empire Mine to build tunnels and pump mine shafts clear of groundwater. The Empire Mine didn't begin sniffing profits until the 1870s. Eventually 367 miles of underground shafts would be dug here. The Gold Rush 49ers were a distant memory when the Empire finally closed after more than 100 years of operation in the 1950s. The haul brought to the surface in that time was 5.8 million ounces of gold, worth about 12 billion dollars in 2024 money.

# Arcata and Mad River RR

## Blue Lake

### 1854



The California State Railroad Museum, organized in Sacramento in 1937, is one of the world's great railroad museums. Some of the most powerful steam and diesel locomotives ever built are on display. The Sacramento Valley Railroad was the first to be incorporated in California, on August 4, 1852. But right of way issues meant that the Golden State's first operating railroad began 300 miles from the state capital. The shoreline of the Humboldt Bay was mucky and to facilitate schooners loading lumber the the Union Plank Walk, Rail Track, and Wharf Company built a pier out into the water with redwood timbers as rails. California's first train cars were pulled by horses. At the time there were at least 150 railroads in America and there was a raging debate over the "standard" gauge, the distance between rails. Should it be 4 feet 8 1/2 inches? Or 5 feet? Wider? The builders at the port of Arcata paid no mind - their gauge was set at 3 feet 9 1/4 inches. The story goes that was the width of the first set of wheels they found to use. Despite its rudimentary beginnings the railroad survived - even prospered - until the 1930s. The line eventually stretched almost to eight miles and featured four steam locomotives. After it became Arcata and Mad River RR the service tied into the Northwestern Pacific mainline in 1914. Traces of California's pioneering railroad still exist, including the depot building in Blue Lake, now a museum.

# Point Pinos Lighthouse

## Pacific Grove

### 1855



On September 28, 1850, by an Act of Congress, \$90,000 was appropriated for "a lighthouse at Alcatraz Island, for a lighthouse at Point Conception and a fog signal, for a lighthouse at Battery Point entrance of the Bay of San Francisco, for a lighthouse at San Diego, for a lighthouse and fog signal at Monterey, for a lighthouse at Farallones off the harbor of San Francisco and a fog signal." These would be the first six lighthouses erected on the West Coast. All were to be fashioned in the style of a New England cottage and all were to be completed by the first of November 1853. Low bidders on the contract were Francis Kelly and Francis Gibbons of Baltimore and it took them more than a year to assemble all the material and hire the bricklayers, carpenters, blacksmiths, masons and other craftsmen for the trip around South America to California. The ship did not pull into San Francisco Bay until December 1852. Alcatraz was up first but the light was replaced in 1909 to accommodate the penitentiary on the island so the oldest continually operating lighthouse of the four dozen or so beacons illuminating California's 800 miles of coastline today is at Point Pinos where even the third-order Fresnel ones ground in France is original. The lighthouse sending a beam 17 miles into the tricky southern approach to Monterey Bay utilized civilian keepers, several who stayed on the job for over 20 years, until 1960.



# James Marshall Cabin

## Coloma

### 1856



It was inevitable that Americans would eventually cross the country to live in California in large numbers. Too much good climate, too much natural resources, too much opportunity. Of course no one could imagine that 400,000 people would come at once within months of the United States winning the Alta California Territory in the Mexican-American War. Mexican officials likely shed few tears as they signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo on February 2, 1848 and waved goodbye to about 7,000 settlers living in a widely dispersed string of mission towns. What no one at the peace talks knew was that on January 24 James Marshall had found some shiny flakes - nothing much more than a quarter of an ounce - in a tailrace he was building at John Sutter's sawmill. Small amounts of gold had been discovered in California before without any attention but in American hands President James K. Polk made public note of this find. The next year there were 100,000 people, dubbed "forty-niners" in the press, poking around California. American territories in the 19th century needed 60,000 inhabitants to petition for statehood and most required decades to get a star on the flag. California became the 31st state in the Union without ever organizing as a territory. The Gold Rush was like nothing the country had seen before or ever saw again. In its first census in 1860 California had 379,994 residents, 26th among all states. Gold fever eventually chilled - California did not crack the nation's Top 20 states for population until 1910. Neither John Sutter nor James Marshall became rich. Marshall built this unassuming cabin in 1856 where he lived until 1870. Penniless most of his life, Marshall was awarded a small pension from the California State Legislature in 1872.

# Hendy Iron Works

## Sunnyvale

### 1856



A truism of gold rushes is that the ones who really strike it rich are the ones selling to the miners. Enter Joshua Hendy. Born in England, Hendy sailed for America at the age of 14 as a blacksmith apprentice. After stints in shops in Massachusetts, South Carolina and Texas he was on a boat “round the horn” and headed for California at the age of 27. After looking at the gold fields Hendy concluded that the giant trees were a better bet than the streams and mines and started a commercial redwood sawmill in Be-

nicia. In 1856 he moved to San Francisco to open the Hendy Machine Works. Hendy fabricated innovative hydraulic equipment for the mining industry that became must-haves as the easy gold disappeared. When mining revenue waned Hendy machines became indispensable in the sawmill and dairy industries. By the time of his death in 1891 his machine shop occupied a full city block near the Embarcadero. The 1906 Earthquake destroyed the Hendy Iron Works and nephews Samuel and John took Sunnyvale up on an offer of free land to rebuild the plant along the Southern Pacific Railroad hard by the San Francisco Bay. The machine shop pivoted quickly to military production in World War I and even more so in World War II when 11,500 employees churned out critical parts for the nation’s fleet of cargo-bearing Liberty Ships. After that effort Hendy Iron Works was absorbed into Westinghouse Electric and later Northrop Grumman as the plant became exclusively a defense production facility. The old Hendy administration building out front carries on as a museum.

# Bidwell Bar Bridge

## Oroville

### 1856



Suspension bridges are one of our oldest forms of bridge-building, dating back to the 1400s when Thangtong Gyalpo used iron chains to hang decks around Tibet and Bhutan. The first wire-cable suspension bridge in the United States, just a temporary footbridge in Philadelphia, did not appear until 1796. Suspension bridges did not become widespread until German engineer John Roebling started specializing in the technique in the 1840s; he would culminate his career with the Brooklyn Bridge in the 1880s. California got its first suspension bridges in gold country over the Feather River. The elements for the Bidwell Bar Bridge needed to be manufactured by the Starbuck Iron Works in Troy, New York, shipped around the Cape of Good Horn and hauled overland for assembly. The final tab was \$34,922. Before the bridge opened to traffic a ferry collected 25 cents to cross on foot and \$2.00 for a heavy wagon. The bridge carried traffic until the 1960s when it was replaced by what was the third highest suspension bridge in the world at the time - although when the Lake Oroville Reservoir is filled the span sits just above the water level. California's oldest remaining suspension bridge was taken apart and reassembled at the south end of the lake.

# State Capitol

## Sacramento

### 1860



After California was granted statehood and following intense lobbying at the Constitutional Convention, San Jose became the first capital. Town leaders hastily purchased a two-story hotel under construction to accommodate the state legislature but an unusually wet winter delayed progress on the building. After holding senate sessions in private houses and slogging through knee-deep muddy streets the disgruntled legislators voted to move the

capital from San Jose before the third session convened. California's first capitol building was left vacant and consumed by fire in 1853. The following year Sacramento was tabbed as the permanent capital. Not that the matter was settled in everybody's eyes. There would be talk about moving well into the 1900s from places like Berkeley and San Jose and Monterey but after 170 years the matter now seems likely settled - Sacramento is the sixth largest city in California with 525,000 people and over 70,000 of them work for the state government. Reuben Clark, leaning heavily on the United States Capitol building for inspiration, drew up the plans for the California State Capitol.

# Charles Krug Winery

## Saint Helena

### 1861



George Calvert Yount's grave in the town that bears his name has been recognized as a California Historical Landmark, attributing to him "all the finest qualities of an advancing civilization blending with the existing primitive culture." The historic citation makes no mention of growing the first grapes in Napa Valley. The North Carolina-born Yount was a cattleman by trade but in 1825 after a neighbor embezzled his savings he headed West as a trapper. Yount is said to be the first American citizen to declare Mexican citizenry and receive a generous land grant to settle the northern Alta California frontier. By the time he got around for sending for his wife in 1841 she had married someone else. Prussian emigrant Charles Krug built the Valley's first commercial winery in 1861 which became the model for 140 fellow California vintners in the next few decades. The good times stopped rolling in the early 1900s when a ravenous root louse gobbled 80% of Napa's vines and then the national Volstead Act banned any beverage in the country with more than one half percent alcohol for 15 years. To help rejuvenate the wine business seven local winegrowers banded together in 1944 to move forward as the Napa Valley Vintners. If ever a trade association enjoyed a watershed moment it was in Paris, France in 1976. Playing the role of David on Goliath's home turf two California wineries scored top honors in the blind taste tests, rocketing Napa Valley to oenophilic superstardom. Today's Napa Valley Vinters includes more than 500 wineries and an international reputation for excellence.

# McElroy House

San Francisco

1861



Orson Squire Fowler was responsible for two wildly different fads in the middle of the 19th century. One was phrenology, the practice that mental acuity could be determined by the bumps on one's head. The other was eight-sided houses that he championed in a book called *The Octagon House, A Home for All*. Neither are much in vogue

these days but the octagon at least made sense. The houses offered a greater space-to-surface ratio and thus were cheaper to construct than rectangular houses. You could get more interior light and greater cross-ventilation, both important considerations in the days before electricity. But the lack of square corners would play havoc with interior designers. Octagons enjoyed a longer popularity with barns where furniture wasn't as much of an issue. Following Fowler's book like a YouTube how-to video William and Harriet McElroy tackled their new eight-sider in a rural area of San Francisco known as Cow Hollow. The final product looks to be a reproduction of "The Best Plan Yet" from Fowler's 1853 book. The house stayed in the McElroy family until the 1920s. The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America rescued the deteriorating redwood octagon in 1952 and operate it as a house museum.

# Bridgeport Covered Bridge

## Bridgeport

### 1862



Covered bridges are the favorites of romantics everywhere. Wooden bridges were, however, the apogee of practicality - the roof protected the structural elements from the weather. It is estimated that over 14,000 covered transportation bridges have been constructed in the United States and fewer than 1,000 remain. California boasts ten "kissing bridges" - a half dozen from the 19th century days of horse-drawn buggies and buckboards. The Bridgeport Covered Bridge was constructed by sawmill owner David Wood with some urgency. The first major discovery of silver in the United States had recently been discovered by Henry Comstock in Virginia City, Nevada and the Virginia City Turnpike Company needed a toll road built to San Francisco pronto. Wood created a unique bridge with an auxiliary Burr Arch in the center of a Howe Truss; the design would become a model for fellow California bridge builders. The 233-foot span over the South Yuba River has survived - thanks to a recent million-dollar restoration - to not only be one of the oldest covered bridges in the Golden State but the longest single span covered bridge anywhere.

# Summit Tunnel

## Donner Pass

1865



An estimated 400,000 settlers headed west on the Oregon Trail beginning in the 1840s. Almost all survived wherever it was they decided to end up. For those headed to California the jump-off point of the Trail was in today's southern Idaho. Even though the 2,100-mile wagon road was well established almost from the get-go there were always ideas on how to conquer the journey quicker. Lansford Hastings was one who had a better way to get to California by leaving the Oregon Trail earlier, from Fort Bridger in Wyoming.

Two families he persuaded were the Reeds and the Donners from Indiana in 1846. The Hastings Cutoff had never been attempted with wagons and undue delays kept the Donner Party from traversing a 7,056-foot pass through the Sierra Nevadas before snowfall. Forced to overwinter in one of the snowiest spots in the Western Hemisphere only 48 of the 87 members of the pioneer caravan were alive to be rescued the following spring. While most of the mountain passes in California were named for their discoverers Donner Pass assumed the name of unluckiest of Golden State-bound settlers. The Donner cabins were already tourist attractions of sorts when the Central Pacific Company arrived in 1865 to complete their side of the Transcontinental Railroad. The Central Pacific would build 15 tunnels through the Sierras but all paled in difficulty to the Summit Tunnel on the Donner Pass - 1/3 of a mile through solid granite. Thousands of Chinese workers were hired through contractors who recruited men directly from China, some with knowledge of gunpowder that was, save for back-breaking labor, the only tool available for the job. Some days progress under snow sheds would be measured in inches but the Chinese crews wrapped up work on the tunnels in a staggering 16 months, more than a year-and-a-half ahead of schedule. The tunnel was abandoned in 1993 but is still accessible to hikers.



# Nevada Theatre

Nevada City

1865



In the final decades of the 19th century most communities boasted an opera house although its function was often for just about everything except opera. Townsfolk would come to enjoy lectures, watch pageants and graduations and patronize live performances. Among those who graced the stage in Nevada City were Mark Twain, Jack London and the revered star of the California mining camps, Lotta Crabtree. Lotta arrived in California from New York with her family when she was six years old in 1853. Soon she was dancing and singing and playing the banjo for entertainment-starved miners. By the time she moved to San Francisco a decade later she owned her own theatrical company. When Crabtree appeared in Nevada City the audiences were in the thousands. "The San Francisco Favorite" headed to the East Coast where she became "The Nation's Darling" and America's best paid actress. The Nevada Theatre went through a period in the 1900s as a movie house but has been restored as a stage befitting California's oldest existing theater building.

# Fort Bidwell

Fort Bidwell

1865



In the matter of “taming” the American West there was always a theory, never predominant, that it was easier to sublimate the indigenous peoples with books rather than bullets. The idea of “cultural assimilation” goes all the way back to George Washington. After 1880 the federal government eventually banned all traditional Indian religious practices and established boarding schools where children were forced off their reservations and required to speak English. “Kill the Indian, save the man,” was the government credo. Their success was a mixed bag. Demand for some Indian schools outstripped capacity, attracting students from distant tribes. Sports were played at high levels and some students matriculated into colleges and jobs. Others devolved into cheap labor camps, rife with student abuses. California had three Indian Boarding Schools. Fort Bidwell Indian School was the last to open, in 1898, and the first to close, in 1930. St. Boniface Indian Industrial School in Banning was the first, operating from 1890 until 1952; all its buildings were demolished in 1974. The Perris Indian School opened in 1892 and moved to the Sherman Institute in Riverside in 1903; the school still operates as Sherman Indian High School, part of the state educational system with 70% of the student body drawn from local reservations. All left complicated legacies for individual students behind their shuttered doors. What cannot be denied, however, is that they were the only schools ever set up by the government to erase the culture of an entire people. At Fort Bidwell each October California Indian Day Celebration honors the Fort Bidwell Indian Boarding School Elders.

# Knight Foundry

## Sutter Creek

### 1872



Water has been used for power for centuries but Gold Rush miners in the West faced challenges unknown by their American predecessors in the East. California streams often lacked reliable year-round flow. To compensate, resourceful miners developed a system of hydraulic mining that sent water from collection vats plummeting down hundreds of

feet of flumes to concentrate the stream into an impulse water wheel. The problem was that water splashed out of the revolving buckets, sapping efficiency from the system. Samuel Knight improved the operation with metal buckets and a patented single-piece cast iron wheel in 1875 which quickly won favor in the mining fields. His foundry grew into the largest outside of San Francisco, keeping 44 workers busy. While working with a Knight wheel millwright Lester Pelton watched a bucket slip out of position and the wheel actually pick up speed when struck by the jet. Pelton tinkered with dozens of configurations until developing a split bucket water wheel that he unveiled in an Idaho Mining Company trial. Pelton's wheel operated at 90.2% efficiency to the Knight wheel's 76.5%. The Pelton Wheel became the prototype for massive turbines used in modern hydroelectric power generation. Lester Pelton became rich, inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame, and was featured in a television episode of *Death Valley Days*. The Pelton Wheel is also why we have the Knight Foundry today, an industrial 19th century treasure. Samuel Knight continued inventing and manufacturing equipment and the foundry would remain in business until 1996. But there was never a wild success that necessitated modernization, nor did a succession of owners feeling the urge to upgrade the operation. So the Knight Foundry survives as a rare original worksite from America's early days of water power.

# South Hall

Berkeley

1873



In 1862 in the midst of the Civil War Justin Morrill, a representative from Vermont, served up one of the most impactful bills ever introduced in Congress. The Morrill Land-Grant College Act of 1862 divided up 11 million acres of Western lands to give to states to sell and use the proceeds to endow “at least one college” for scientific studies. Each state received 30,000 acres for each member of Congress; being only 12 years old California pocketed 150,000 acres. The bounty was ticketed for the Agricultural, Mining, and Mechanical Arts College when actual money showed up in the bank. Meanwhile trustees of a newly chartered College of California had bought farms north of Oakland facing the Golden Gate that had strained their resources. A school without money and a pool of money without a school. The legislature welded the two together under the banner of University of California in 1868. North and South Halls, to house the College of Letters and the College of Agriculture, were the first two buildings planned for campus. The wrecking ball claimed North Hall in 1917, leaving South Hall as the only souvenir of the University of California-Berkeley’s original core of buildings. The ornate Second Empire design is a vivid reminder of how the West deferred to Eastern tastes in all things cultural until finding its own footing in the 1900s.

# Cable Railway

## San Francisco

### 1873



In 1852 Andrew Smith bought an interest in a Mariposa County gold mine and left his native Scotland with his 16-year old son Andrew to investigate. What he found was not promising and the next year Smith was back in Scotland. But Andrew, who would adopt the sur-

name of his inventor uncle Andrew Hallidie, remained to work in the gold fields. Dad may have left too soon. Young Andrew observed that the ropes used to pull ore cars in the hills were often not up to the job. Using wire rope patented by his father Hallidie employed cables laid between the tracks to ease cars down the slopes. The cars gripped the cable as needed and were pulled along by machinery. Andrew Smith Hallidie saw more dollar signs in the cable than the ore in the cars and left for San Francisco to manufacture wire rope. In 1873 Hallidie introduced the first cable cars to San Francisco on the notoriously steep Clay Street. There were other grip car transportation systems around, most notably in New York City and Chicago, which operated the largest and most profitable cable car system in America. But other places didn't have San Francisco's severe hills and cities found it easier to just use electrified trolleys when the technology became available. Meanwhile the Clay Street Hill Railroad was just the beginning in San Francisco where there would be 23 cable car lines by the time of Hallidie's death at the age of 64 in 1900. Three routes of the world's last manually operated cable car system remain today: one along California Street and two running from Union Square to Fisherman's Wharf. Since the cable cars only travel in one direction when the cars reach the end of the line a gripman manually rotates the car on a turntable for the return trip.

# Burbank House

Santa Rosa

1875



Nowhere is a seller's reputation of more paramount importance than the seed business. To the consumer an ill-bred seed looks exactly like the blue-ribbon winner. Not until the plant actually grows months later will the buyer know if he has made a good bargain. As a young man in Massachusetts Luther Burbank developed a potato which he sold the rights to produce for \$150 in 1875. Burbank used the money to skedaddle all the way across the country and went into the nursery business. Burbank built a good reputation but his passion lay as a hybridizer of plants, not a merchant. His experiments in Santa Rosa attracted the support of moneymen like Andrew Carnegie and Thomas Edison and Burbank went on to introduce over 800 new plants to the world. Significantly for California agriculture, and therefore everyone, Burbank focused on crop plants, fruits and nuts. He was fastidious in his methods, growing 10,000 plants at a time and selecting a handful of seeds to produce the next batch of 10,000 until his efforts bore the fruits he desired. The work in the Santa Rosa experimental farm became the backbone for modern plant genetics and breeding. Henry Ford packed up Burbank's garden office and moved it to his collection of Americana in Michigan but his home and garden of 52 years became a park and museum. And that original Burbank potato? The Russet Burbank is the most widely grown potato in America.

# Wawona Hotel

Wawona

1876



Canadian-born Galen Clark jumped into the California Gold Rush in 1854 after his wife died when he was 40 years old. Instead of finding gold he contracted tuberculosis. His doctor gave him the proverbial six months to live so he headed for the mountains where he figured his prospects for survival would be "about even." He became the first non-indigenous person to see and write about giant sequoias, the largest living organisms on earth. Clark immediately began agitating for the sequoia's protection and in 1864 President Abraham Lincoln signed preservation legislation for the Mariposa Grove "to be left inalienable for all time." The rambling Wawona Hotel was built for tourists visiting the magnificent trees. "Preservation" was a different animal in the 19th century - one of the first things done for visitors to the Mariposa Grove was to bore a hole through the 26-foot diameter of the Wawona Tree for carriages in 1881. The world's first "tunnel tree" was joined by a half-dozen others, including the California Tunnel Tree in the Mariposa Grove in 1895. When the National Park Service formed in 1916 the tunnel trees were promoted as stars for the new parks. At least Galen Clark didn't have to bear witness to the degradation; he had died in 1910 at the age of 95, surviving a half-century beyond his assumed death sentence. The Wawona, now in Yosemite National Park, is still a base for big tree hunting.

# Saloon

Bodie

1877



There had not been a really big gold strike in California for more than 20 years when word spread in 1876 of a mine cave-in north of Mono Lake that uncovered a juicy vein of ore. Dreams die hard. The population of Bodie jumped from a few dozen to an estimated 5,000 by 1880. There were more than 2,000 structures in town. It looked like W.S. Bodey had imagined after he had made a minor strike in the area in 1859. The town never grew after that but Bodey also never suffered the disappointment - he perished in a blizzard the winter after his discovery. Now Bodie had 65 saloons, a red light district and enough brawls and holdups to provide steady salacious fodder for the several newspapers in town. There was even a Chinatown. But there wasn't that much gold. People were drifting away by 1881 and the population was under 800 by the end of the decade. The mine limped along into the 1940s after which Bodie descended into "ghost town" territory. In 1962 the legislature created Bodie State Historic Park. The 170 or so buildings that remained were preserved in a state of "arrested decay," looking exactly as they did when abandoned, right down to inventories remaining on store shelves.