

# THE GOLD RUSH BUILDS SAN FRANCISCO

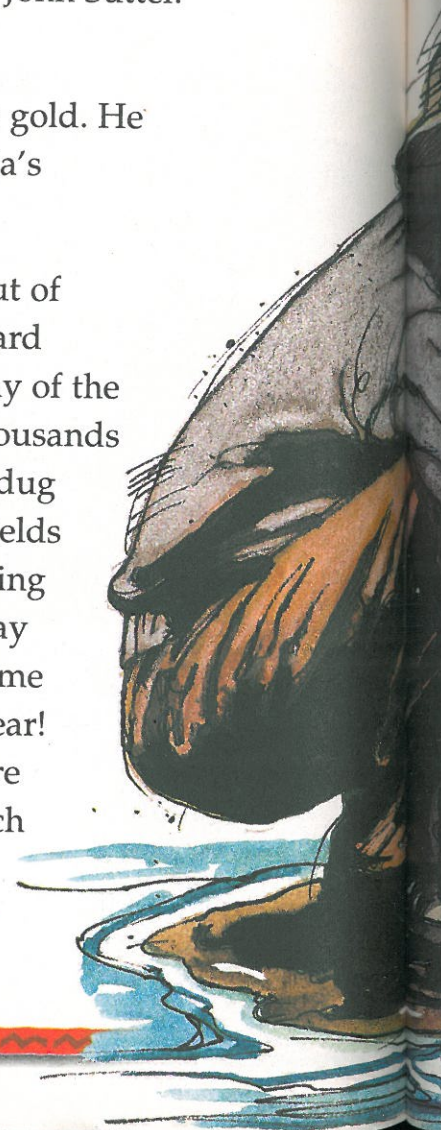


This is what a block of gold looks like.

On January 24, 1848, James Marshall went to the house of his employer, John Sutter. He told John Sutter he had something important to tell him. He hurried John Sutter up the stairs and into a room, and he insisted the door be locked behind them. Then, James Marshall reached into a pants pocket and pulled out a crumpled-up white cotton rag. He opened the rag and lifted out a yellow, shiny stone about the size of a dime. He held the stone out toward John Sutter. "I think this is gold," James said.

James was right. The nugget was gold. He found it at Sutter's Mill, in California's Sacramento Valley.

Reports of gold began to come out of California. The stories easterners heard seemed too wild to be true. Yet, many of the stories were true. Thousands and thousands of dollars worth of gold were being dug and panned out of the California's fields and streams. Some people were finding \$1,000 worth of gold almost every day they mined. Remember, this was a time when a farmer might make \$400 a year! Nuggets weighing 20 pounds or more were found. And, there was still much more gold to be mined. As one Californian wrote an eastern friend: "You regard our statements as the



## As Good as Gold

Gold has been valued by humans for thousands of years. One reason is because of its beautiful color. Also, it doesn't rust or tarnish. A gold bracelet taken from a 5,000-year-old Egyptian tomb shines as if it were made yesterday.

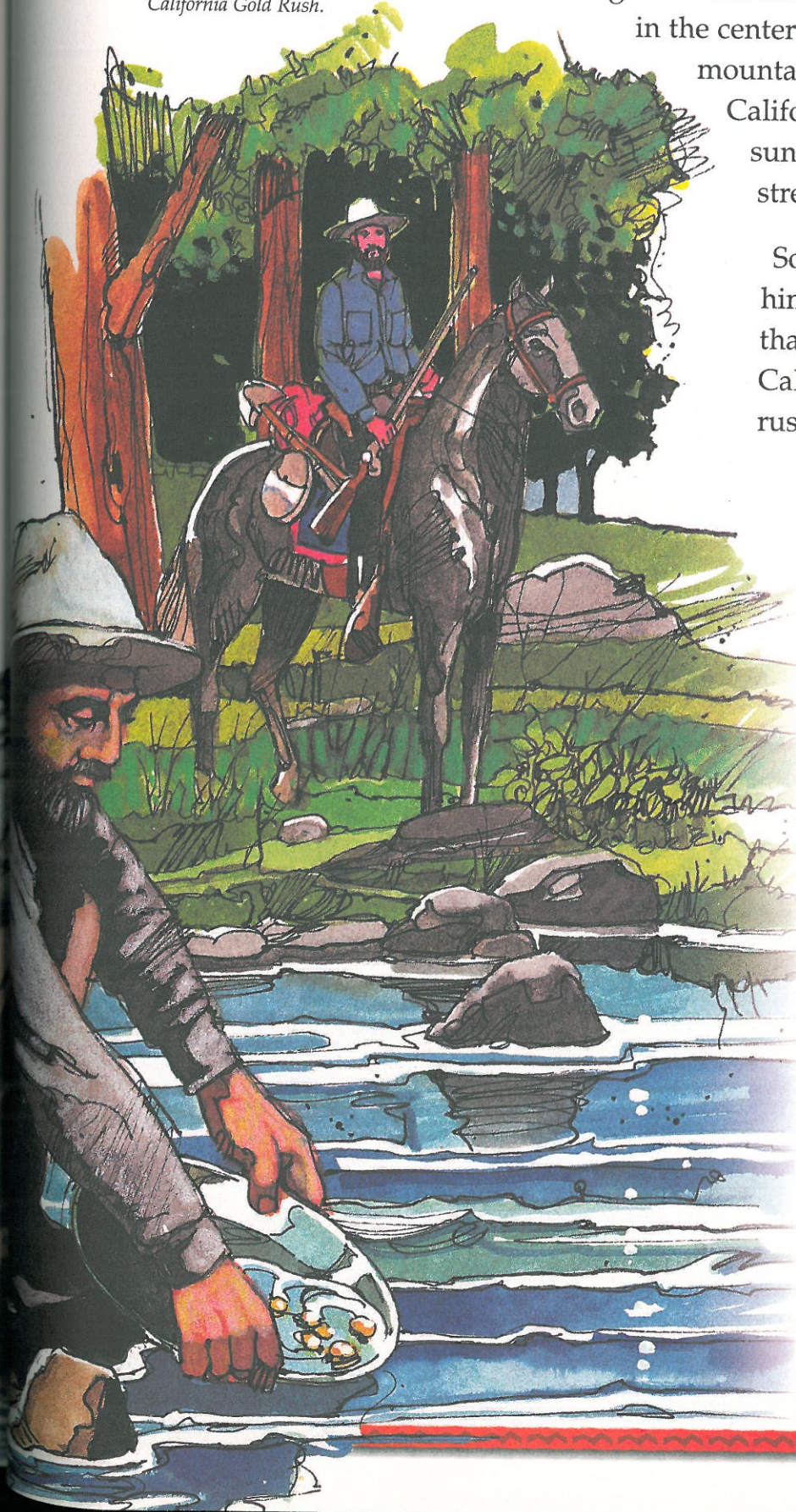
Gold can be drawn out thinner than any other metal. A piece of gold the size of a pea can be drawn out into a wire two miles long! Gold can conduct both heat and electricity. So, it is used in computers and televisions and other machines that run on electricity.

These two prospectors are looking for gold during the California Gold Rush.

dreams of an excited imagination; but what seems to you mere fiction, is stern reality. It is not gold in the clouds, or in the sea, or in the center of a rock-ribbed mountain, but in the soil of California—sparkling in the sun, and glittering in its streams."

Soon, President Polk himself told Congress that there was gold in California. After that, the rush for riches was on.

"Gold fever," they called it. And, it was like a fever. It swept through the East, and then through the world. Whole towns emptied as people started west, called by the promise of gold in California. One person who stayed behind watched the others leave: "All were off for the mines, some on horses, some on carts, and some on crutches, and one went in a litter [stretcher]."



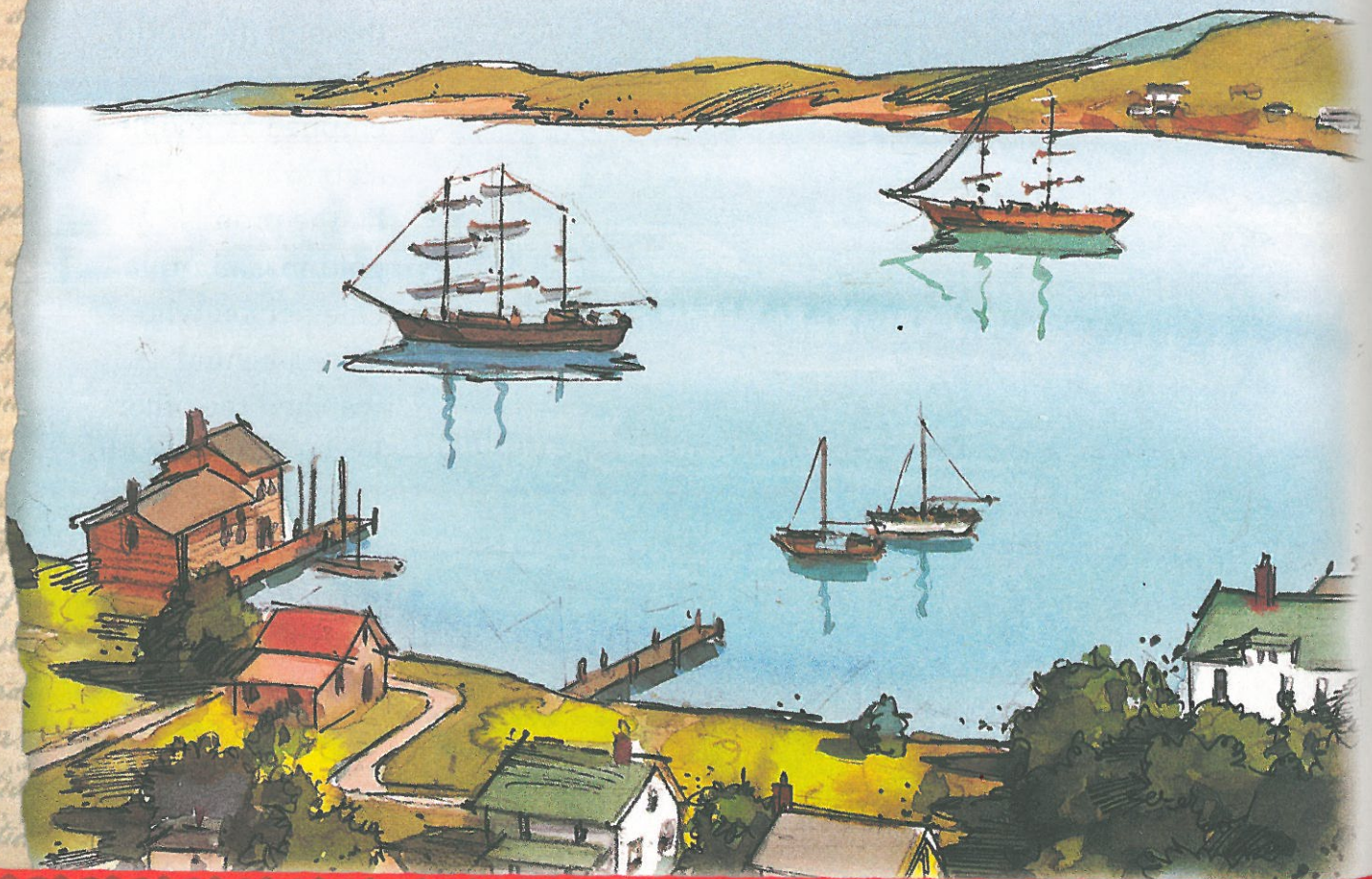
## San Francisco Explodes

In 1848, before Sutter found his gold, San Francisco was just a little settlement. A few dozen houses and perhaps 800 people were all that could be found there, clustered around the San Francisco Bay.

Then came the Gold Rush. San Francisco was the nearest port to California's gold fields. So, hundreds of ships from all over the world headed for the bay. In 1849 alone, 800 ships arrived at San Francisco's port. They carried, all together, 40,000 people. These people had come to search for gold. They all poured through San Francisco on their way to the gold fields.

San Francisco immediately became an important supply center for all the gold seekers. Its population exploded. In that first full-blown year of the Gold Rush, the number of people living in San Francisco swelled from 800 to 25,000. By September, there were 500 houses, with up to 30 new ones being built every day!

By the end of the year, San Francisco was on its way to becoming a city. Here are some of the changes one visitor noticed as 1849 came to an end: "Stages run regularly to the mines, steamboats run on the river; a theatre, church and several large handsome hotels



with billiards saloons and bowling alleys and all the fixings, have been put up . . . Civilization is making rapid strides . . .”

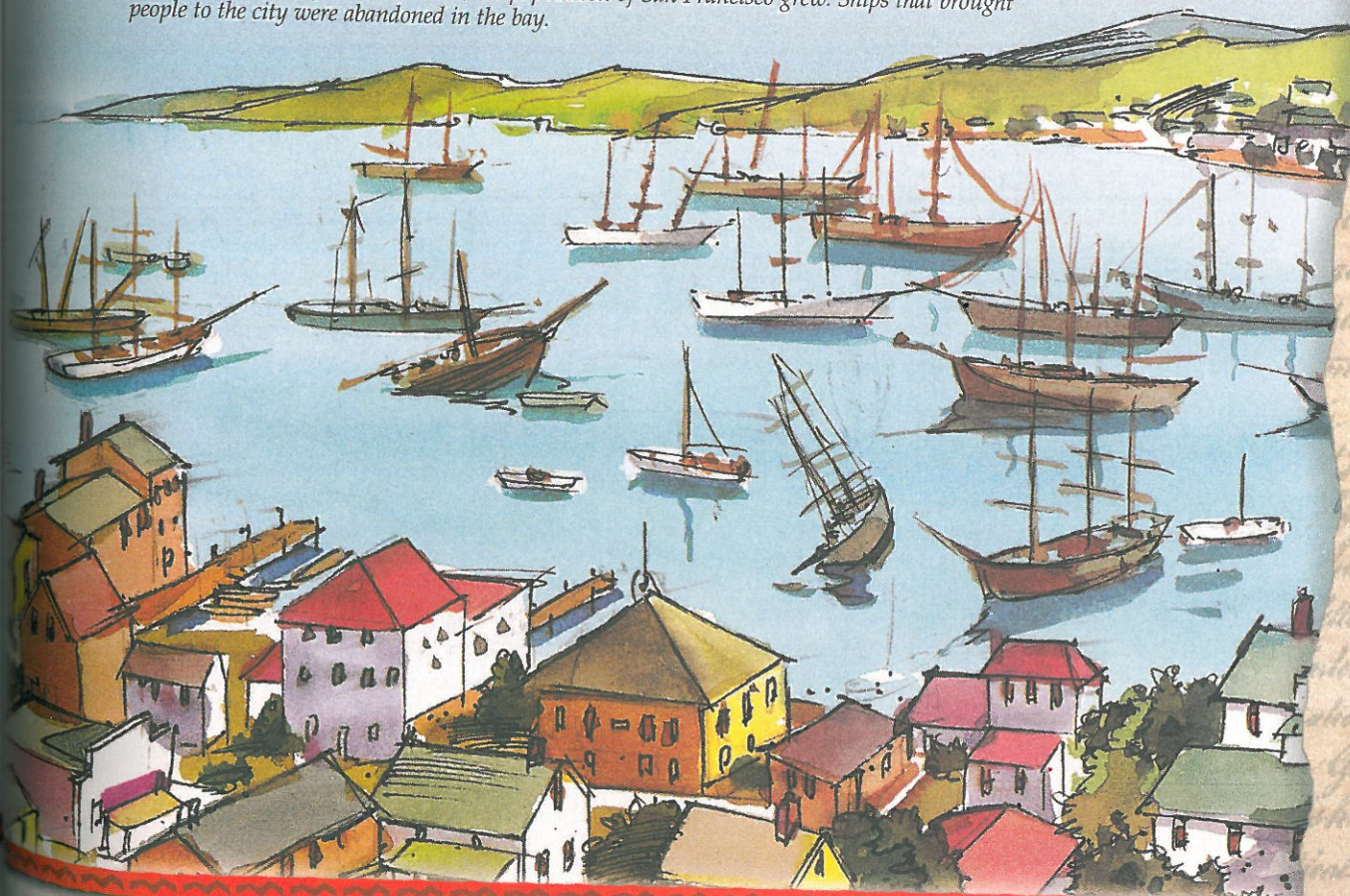
### The Problems of Growth

This unbelievably fast growth caused problems for San Francisco, however. The problems started at the harbor. When the ships came in, their passengers hurried off, heading for the gold fields. In many cases, the ships’ crews followed the passengers to the fields.

Soon, hundreds of ships lay anchored in the bay, abandoned,

rotting, slowly sinking. Sometimes a ship’s cargo sank with the ship, because the ship owners couldn’t find anyone to unload the goods. One group of visitors observed that “. . . some three or four thousand seamen deserted from the many hundred ships lying in the bay. . . . At the time of which we write there were between three and four hundred large square-rigged vessels [in port], unable to leave on account of want of hands. Many of these vessels never got away, but in a few years, afterwards, rotted and tumbled to pieces where they were moored.”

*Left: San Francisco was a small settlement before the Gold Rush.  
Right: As a result of the Gold Rush, the population of San Francisco grew. Ships that brought people to the city were abandoned in the bay.*



Another problem caused by the Gold Rush was that there weren't enough hotels and houses in San Francisco to shelter everybody. Building couldn't possibly keep up with demand. Many people crowded into poorly built shanties. Many others lived in tents. Some even waited until high tide and hauled abandoned boats out onto

land. Then, they lived in the boats. Actually, these often were better built than many of the hastily constructed houses!

There was another problem, too. The thieves and murderers who always follow honest workers caused crime to increase in the city. Some even think these criminals



Notice that one of the buildings was made from an abandoned ship.

set some of the many fires that roared through San Francisco during this time. Then, the crooks could loot houses from which people fled during the blazes.

### The Gold Rush Ends

Eventually, most of California's gold was dug up. The Gold Rush came to an end. Still, many who came for gold decided to stay after the gold was gone. Thanks to the Gold Rush, enough people lived in San Francisco for it to become a city. And, enough people lived in California for it to become a state.

### Show What You Know

Most miners who headed to California carried a special kind of pan. It was a shallow pan, with low sides. Its purpose was to separate gold from the sand of a creek or stream bottom. Here is how a miner used his pan. First, he scooped up sand and water from a creek bed. Then, he carefully swirled the water around and around, slightly tipping the pan so that a little water and sand sloshed out with each swirl. In the end, if the miner did it right, only gold was left in the bottom of the pan, because gold is heavier than sand or water.

Imagine you have gone to California to pan for gold. Find a shallow pan, such as a pie pan. Put some small metal screws in the pan, and pretend the screws are gold nuggets. Now, add water and sand to the pan and try to swirl away everything but the "gold."

