Current Headlines in Evergreen

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Paths to Evergreen

Immigration to Evergreen begins in 1850s

By Colleen Cortese
Evergreen Historian

Evergreen remained quietly isolated for hundreds of years. The forests of oak shaded the creeks and protected the Ohlone people.

Yet this was bound to change when early foreigners began coming to California by sea. Spanish ships arrived in San Francisco and Monterey in the early 1800s.

By 1822, a pioneering spirit coaxed the legendary fur trader Jedediah S. Smith to begin a decade of travel, covering 15,000 miles of the American West. He became the first known white man to reach California over land and also the first to cross the Sierra Nevada Mountains following a well-traveled fur trapper's path. A few years later this path would become the great emigrant route.

Captain John Sutter obtained extensive land grants and built a fort at the junction of the American River and the Sacramento River in 1839. Before the gold discovery, Sutter's Fort was the frontier post for the overland emigration where everyone was welcomed. From Sutter's Fort, the gold discovery news spread.

Gold Rush immigration

"Gold Fever" hit San Francisco, causing businesses to close and buildings to be left unfinished. People of all classes—lawyers, storekeepers and merchants—packed up their belongings, gathered shovels and pans and headed to the mines.

In 1849, the immigration to California exceeded all previous migrations in the history of man. By Jan. 1, 1849, ships prepared to depart from every seaport on the Atlantic coast. Sixty ships alone left from New York.

As the snow melted across the Sierra Nevada range, the overland travel began for 40,000 men gathered at different points along the Missouri River. Horses, mules and oxen pulled all manner of vehicles. Ahead of the gold hunters lay unknown suffering, and for many, death.

Thousands died when cholera broke out among the wagon trains. Those able to continue the long journey staggered across the desert where exhaustion and starvation took the lives of many more.

As if their hardships crossing the desert were not enough, they now faced the great Sierras. Blinded by the color of gold and deaf to the cries of their women and children, they pressed on toward the Golden State.
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