

National History Standards

Era 4: Expansion and Reform

Standard 1C: The student understands the ideology of Manifest Destiny, the nation's expansion to the Northwest, and the Mexican-American War.

- Explain the economic, political, racial, and religious roots of Manifest Destiny and analyze how the concept influenced the westward expansion of the nation. [Examine the influence of ideas]
- Explain the causes of the Texas War for Independence and the Mexican-American War and evaluate the provisions and consequences of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. [Analyze multiple causation]

Standard 2E: The student understands the settlement of the West.

- Explore the lure of the West and the reality of life on the frontier. [Examine the influence of ideas]
- Contrast the causes and character of the rapid settlement of California and Oregon in the late 1840s and 1850s. [Compare and contrast different patterns of settlement]
- Examine the origins and political organization of the Mormons, explaining the motives for their trek west and evaluating their contributions to the settlement of the West. [Appreciate historical perspectives]
- Analyze cultural interactions among diverse groups in the trans-Mississippi region. [Consider multiple perspectives]
- Assess the degree to which political democracy was a characteristic of the West and evaluate the factors influencing political and social conditions on the frontier. [Differentiate between historical facts and historical interpretations]

I. Object

Q: What does the gold nugget look like?

Response: Sure. [00:00:14] The first find gold nugget is about half the size of your little fingernail, roughly a quarter inch by three-eighths of an inch, very tiny fleck [00:00:23] of gold by gold standards. Weighs a tenth of a troy ounce. If you look at it strangely, you might not even see it as gold. Let me reword [00:00:37] that. The gold nugget is not even a nugget. It's a fleck of gold, a flake, a whisper of what it really stands for. To me, it's a piece of [00:00:48] a metal. It's a symbol of something really big, the California gold rush, but it's also a reminder that museum objects come in many forms, many sizes, many [00:00:58] packages and it's up to us to unwrap that package, to explore it, to understand why it's here, and where it can take us.

Q: And so if we think [00:05:45] about the gold rush and what this little fleck of gold sort of started this massive migration, where are these folks coming from and whose sort [00:05:56] of your typical person who would participate? Is there one?

Response: Good question. Is there a typical gold miner? Is [00:06:04] there a typical what was called an Argonaut at the time? If there was a typical gold miner during the gold rush of the 1840s, it would be a man [00:06:17] or a woman who up and left their home, their place of business and headed for California, headed for the hills, headed for the diggings to find [00:06:26] that color in the ground in the belief that they not only could find gold but they could transform their lives. The gold fever, the gold rush [00:06:37] was a very personal journey for tens of thousands of people, between eighty and a hundred thousand people worldwide descended on northern [00:06:48] California in a matter of months. They'd heard about, they'd read about the riches, that you can pluck gold off the [00:06:55] streets, that you stooped down with a spoon and sift it out of the ground and you were rich.

So, a typical person could've been a banker or his [00:07:05] clerk, a lawyer, a sailor, blacksmith, a baker, a seamstress, a wife, a husband. They up and left in many cases and headed for [00:07:18] California. They took off over overland by train, by stagecoach, they left from the east coast by ship down around Cape Horn. Many traveled across [00:07:27] the Isthmus of Panama over land, a journey of many weeks, but they were questing for something, not just gold but for personal transformation.

Q: Were only American citizens involved with the Gold Rush?
Approximately 9:35-10:10

Response: The gold rush was international in every way. Europeans, Chinese, [00:09:44] Russians, Mexicans, Indians. No group was exempted from the gold fever and they were equally accepted in the fields, at least initially, [00:09:55] until cultural differences began to get in the way. California became a global magnet for peoples all over the world. Come to California, the land of riches, streets [00:10:06] are paved with gold.

Q: Do you have any sense from the [00:29:44] folks who are in Coloma from Sutter or Marshall or any of those folks that there's a sense of sort of self-reflectiveness about their [00:29:54] relationship with the native peoples there?

Response: In later years, both Marshall and Sutter had occasions to reflect on what the gold rush did to them and what their [00:30:07] fates would've been otherwise. Their treatment of the native peoples I don't believe was among that. The native populations of [00:30:16] California were subjected to various levels of cruelty and dismissal. Certainly they were treated with a different kind of care by the Spanish missions [00:30:28] in the early 19th century, late 18th century until 1833 when the mission system was broken up. It caused trauma and dislocation among [00:30:37] many of the west coast Indian

populations. Who were they to believe in? Who were they to trust? And along comes the gold rush, something [00:30:50] they didn't understand.

It's important to remember that gold was not first found in 1848. The native peoples, the Mexicans knew that there was gold here and there [00:31:00] around the state. It had been found since the 16th century by the Spanish, so gold was nothing new to them. What was new was the rush. All [00:31:10] these strangers, all these immigrants, these foreign peoples pouring into the land. What should they do? Should they fight them? Should they [00:31:15] work for them? Should they work with them? Should they somehow start mining their own land for gold? So it became a very tangled time for [00:31:26] native populations along with everyone else. Sadly, the dislocation continued, certainly spurred by the mining camps, the devastation [00:31:34] of the land, the loss of their hunting territory and their farms, so that is one of the sad consequences of the gold rush, what became [00:31:44] of the native populations of California.

Chinese Immigrants

Annotation: Most of the first Chinese immigrants to California were young men who left behind families in search of fortune in America. Some of these families were eventually reunited, but many were not. A record of the grief the wives and families of these Gold Mountain men exists in the form of folk songs. Three of those folk songs are as follows:

In the second reign year of Haamfung, a trip to Gold Mountain was made.
With a pillow on my shoulder, I began my perilous journey.
Sailing a boat with bamboo poles across the seas,
Leaving behind wife and sisters in search of money,
No longer lingering with the woman in the bedroom,
No longer paying respect to parents at home.

Yik Jook, Yee Jook
I beg of you, after you depart, to come back soon,
Our separation will be only a flash of time;
I only wish that you would have good fortune.
In three years you would be home again.

Also, I beg of you that your heart won't change,
That you keep your heart and mind on taking care of our family;
Each month or half a month send a letter home.
In two or three years my wish is to welcome you home.

O, just marry all the daughters to men from Gold Mountain:
All those trunks from Gold Mountain – you can demand as many as you want!
O, don't every marry your daughter to a man from Gold Mountain:
Lonely and sad – a cooking pot is her only companion!

Mexicans

Mormon Emigrants

Annotation: One of the first Mormon groups to arrive in California was made up of members of the Mormon Battalion. This battalion had fought in the Mexican War and now made their way to California just before the gold rush. It was members of the Mormon Battalion who were enlisted as a labor force by John Sutter to assist in building a gristmill and a sawmill near Sutter's Fort. One veteran of the Mormon Battalion named Henry Bigler recalled his experiences working for Sutter in 1886. Bigler volunteered to work on the construction of the sawmill under James Marshall in the fall of 1847. Some of his thoughts and recollections of the events surrounding his employment during the winter of 1847-1848 are as follows:

“We earned one dollar and fifty cents per day all around to the man. Our hands were tender and soon became very sore. Some of our men were taken sick with chills and scurvy.

While at dinner on the 27th [of September 1847], a man entered our quarters dressed in buckskin, and said Captain Sutter wanted four men from our company to go up into the mountains about thirty miles to help build a saw-mill on the south fork of the American River. He said that he and Sutter were partners in building the mill and that he had been up there with a few hands and had done a little work, but some of them were expecting to leave soon, hence they wanted more help. This man was Jams Wilson Marshall... Marshall took an ox team and wagon loaded with provisions, and a few tools. We arrived at the mill site in the evening of the 29th, where we found several of the battalion boys who, by the advice of Levi W. Hancock, had stopped at Sutter's at the time we passed their in August.

To me the surrounding country looked wild and lonesome. We were surrounded by high mountains, more or less covered with a heavy growth of pine, balsam, redwood, pinion pine and oak timber. The place was infested with wolves, grizzly bears and Indians. Before our arrival at the mill site, Marshall and the brethren had built a nice double log cabin about one-fourth of a mile from the mill. In one part of the house lived a family. The man's name was Peter L. Wemer [Peter L. Wimmer], whose wife [Jennie Wimmer] was to be cook for the mill hands.”

Source used: Kenneth N Owens, *Gold Rush Saints: California Mormons and the Great Rush for Riches*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004.

Women and the Gold Rush

Annotation: One favorite myth of the West is that the Gold Rush was almost exclusively a mass movement of men. Nearly every trail diary, however, indicates the presence of women who traveled to California during the height of the Gold Rush. The stereotype that women came to California unwillingly with their husbands is prevalently accepted, but does not begin to explain the motives of the women who journeyed to

California alone or with siblings in search of adventure and riches. Women in California were not all prostitutes either. Just to name a few positions women held, women in California mined for gold, ran boardinghouses and Laundromats, and entertained in theatres. One woman who caught the gold fever, Lucena Parsons, recorded in her journal her daily activities in California. An excerpt of that journal is as follows:

May 31. This morning the gold fever raged so high that I went again to dig with the rest but got very little gold... Came home tired to night. Still in good spirits.

June 2. We again went to the canion to find that bewitching ore that is called gold. We had better luck in finding it to day, my husband & I making 16 dollars in fine dust.

June 3. This morning there was a general turn out to the mines... We made 10 dollars to day.

June 4. We went to the canion again and did very well, made some 8 dollars to day. It is very hard work to dig & wash sand. (Levy 110)

In fact, it was a woman at Sutter's Fort when gold was first discovered who suggested an appropriate test that could be conducted on the newly discovered nugget to determine its authenticity. Jennie Wimmer, her husband, and their seven children had immigrated to California in 1846 with fourteen other families. John Sutter hired her husband as an overseer for the sawmill while Jennie was hired as the camp cook and laundress. When James Marshall discovered gold, neither nor the crew had seen gold in its natural state, so they were uncertain whether they had in fact found a gold nugget. Jennie Wimmer recalled, "I said, 'This is gold, and I will throw it into my lye kettle... and if it is gold, it will be gold when it comes out.' I finished off my soap that day and set it off to cool, and it stayed there till next morning. At the breakfast table one of the work hands raised up his head from eating and said, 'I heard something about gold being discovered, what about it?' ... I told him it was in my soap kettle... A plank was brought for me to lay my soap onto, and I cut it in chunks, but it was not to be found, at the bottom of the pot was a double handful of potash, which I lifted in my two hands, and there was my gold as bright as could be." (Levy XX).

Source used: Jo Ann Levy, *They Saw the Elephant: Women in the California Gold Rush*. Hamden: The Shoe String Press, 1990

Narratives:

William Johnston

Samuel Upham

Objects:

Torah mantle

Torah Mantle, 1785–86

Made in Wenkheim, Germany, this silk Torah mantle was brought to San Francisco by Jewish immigrants during the California gold rush and presented to Congregation Emanu-El.

Founded in 1850, Emanu-El (Hebrew for “God is with us”) was one of the first synagogues in San Francisco. It provided a spiritual and social community for German and central European Jews who came to California in search of economic opportunities and political freedom.

http://americanhistory.si.edu/exhibitions/small_exhibition.cfm?key=1267&exkey=143&pagekey=248

Pans and scales

Pick

II. Object in History

Q: What sort of industries sprang up around the gold mining towns?

Approximately 8:35-9:22

Response: Well, there're many industries that [00:08:35] supported the gold miners. One of them we know of today as Levis. The Levi jeans. Levi Strauss was a [00:08:43] gold miner wanna-be in the 1840s who realized that, heck, gold is not the answer here, what people need are good work clothes. They need [00:08:53] something tough so he started making pants out of sail cloth from all the abandoned ships in San Francisco Bay. Ships would come in [00:09:01] and the sailors would desert their ships and head for the hills leaving behind all these supplies on board, so Levi Strauss, an immigrant Jew [00:09:10] from Europe, decided to make a business out of it. In a similar way, equipment-makers from waterwheels to sluices to small engines produced a huge industry supporting [00:09:22] gold mining.

Q: What role did Mormons play in the story of the Gold Rush in California?

Approximately 22:10-23:20

Response: The Mormons like the Chinese, the Russians, the Indian population, the Europeans, California became a United Nations in so [00:22:18] many ways, of religions and peoples, ethnicities, African Americans were there, but the Mormons were recent arrivals. In the mid-19th century, Brigham Young [00:22:29] led his Mormon host, his Mormon followers, over the mountains from the midwest to Zion, to Salt Lake. Some of his Mormon followers [00:22:41] continued on to the west coast, to the ocean, to form their own settlements. Many of these were independent knowledgeable skilled craftsmen working [00:22:53] in wood and stone and felling trees, farmers. They found work, though, working with people like Sutter, establishing their own settlements [00:23:03] and when Sutter needed some workmen to accompany James Marshall to build the sawmill in Coloma, he sent his Mormon workers, so a small [00:23:11] Mormon encampment appeared and the Mormons continued to mine along with everyone else, all swept up in the rush.

Q: And can you tell us sort of the story of the discovery?

Response: Yes, yes. [00:02:55] The discovery of gold in California—in a sense, it's a simple tale of discovery and then panic and then a fever and then a rush, but [00:03:07] it's a much more complex tale of human emotion and the migration of peoples and the transformation of a continent, so in this little fleck of gold, about [00:03:16] a quarter inch wide, we have a huge story. In this particular case, it's the story of a first find. James Marshall, a traveler from New Jersey, sets [00:03:31] up a shop as a woodwright and a millwright in the hills of California knowing that the settlements there need lumber, need services like he offers. [00:03:41] He offers his labor to Captain Sutter, John Sutter, an immigrant Swiss businessman who set up a fort in a somewhat utopian village, a

village [00:03:53] called New Helvetica near Sacramento. Sutter employs Marshall to build a sawmill on part of his land, land that he has in a sort of soft [00:04:05] way leased from the Mexican government in California. Keep in mind that in the early 1840s, there was no state of California. It was a part of Mexico. The [00:04:18] Russians had loose interests in it and, of course, the native Indian population occupied the land, multiple layers of ownership.

So, into this mix comes [00:04:28] Marshall and his sawmill and in January of 1848, while working on the sawmill, he inspects the work and through the rippling waters of the south [00:04:40] fork of the American River, he sees something yellow glimmering, a yellow morsel he calls it later. He stoops down to pick it up. He bites [00:04:52] it. He walks to the shore and pounds it between rocks and he determines that it's gold. James Marshall has found gold in northern California. He [00:05:03] carries this gold a few days later to his boss, to Captain Sutter, at Sutter's fort in Sacramento and they conduct further tests on this metal. [00:05:14] They use acids. They read up in little books that he has and it mushrooms from there.

A few days, a few weeks later, a man named Sam [00:05:23] Brennan waves a bottle of this yellow metal in the streets of San Francisco. Gold, he cries, gold from the American River. Clearly, Sam has [00:05:35] an angle of some kind and he has a business angle, but, in fact, that cry kicks off what we know today as the gold rush.

Q: So this is happening at the same time that we're having sort of burgeoning and sort of increasingly agitated sectional conflict. [00:10:22] Is there a way in which the north/south split also plays into this attraction to the west?

Response: The gold discovery and the independence of California from [00:10:31] Mexico play a central role in the north/south conflict that led to the Civil War. California became a state in 1850 in part as a result of the debate over [00:10:46] whether California would be a slave state or a free state. Ultimately, the people of California voted to ban slavery. They became a free state, but [00:10:57] it was that question as to what the gold rush would do to California. Would it in fact become a slave state so that the slaves could mine the gold? A natural consequence [00:11:10] of the people in the south who thought they could abandon their plantations and go west with their slaves, mine the gold, [00:11:15] come home wealthy.

Q: . . . [chit-chat]. So, we've got the north/south thing going on. The other thing I'm sort of wondering about is how the sort of [00:11:36] ambiguity of control over California at this time, do you think that that sort of contributes to the successfulness of the gold rush, to the willingness of people [00:11:45] to sort of descend upon this place?

Response: California was an unknown. The west was an unknown for so many peoples and for religious reasons, for [00:11:56] economic reasons, it was perhaps a delightful thing that California was not a fully sanctioned part of the United States. It was this

mysterious Russian Mexican [00:12:08] Indian far-away land full of riches, so I think it contributed to the wonderment of the Argonauts as they made plans to head west, this unknown [00:12:19] land, this potential state, this part of the United States and it really feeds into this notion of manifest destiny. Are Americans destined by some higher [00:12:29] power to head west, to rule the land from coast to coast, from ocean to ocean? Is the land opening itself up, all of its riches and wealth [00:12:41] to the American citizen? Very much like the fulfillment of some dream, so that, too, spurred them on.

Q: I want to ask you particularly about what you feel like sort of the impact [00:14:39] of the discovery is on the land, on the peoples, those sorts of things. We're trying to build a before and after picture of [00:14:48] the discovery of this nugget in California.

Response: The size of our little California gold nugget, our first find nugget, found [00:14:54] by James Marshall, pales in comparison to the impact of gold mining on the land in California. It transformed the state, not just economically and politically [00:15:04] but environmentally. It's one of the most difficult stories to tell because so little evidence remains today. We can only imagine [00:15:14] it through the photographs we see, the decimated hillsides, the trashed rivers and ravines. Gold typically was found in alluvial soils, mixtures [00:15:24] of sand and soft rock and earth created by rivers and creeks and little streams. Northern California is filled with these, so when the gold was discovered [00:15:38] and the miners headed for the hills, they headed for the stream beds. They headed for the beds with picks and axes and shovels, but [00:15:46] also with hammer drills and with water canons and with dynamite and with thousands and thousands of people, all trashing the land, destroying trees, [00:15:58] forests, rivers, looking for the elusive gold metal. It had quite an impact.

Q: You mentioned earlier manifest destiny and I'm wondering if you have a sense [00:27:28] of how pervasive that theory was— There's not really an average miner, but folks who are coming to California, folks who are already in California, do you feel [00:27:41] like— Is there evidence that people who are promoting the gold rush are pushing manifest destiny as a reason or sort of actively mobilizing [00:27:51] this idea?

Response: There're plenty of parties who had it in their own personal best interest to see the miners take off for California. Certainly what we would [00:28:01] call today travel agents, people booking passage head for California, steamers setting sail from the ports along the east coast certainly promoted [00:28:13] the glory and the ideal of a perfect experience in the west. Land of riches. All you need to do is get on board and do it now. Manifest destiny [00:28:26] was both a personal calling and a national creed. It was a theory, but it was also a strong belief that people not only should but [00:28:36] ought to be out west seeking their personal fortunes, their personal manifest destiny but also in a sense, from the political angle, from [00:28:45] the news accounts they read, from the advertising a national responsibility to travel the country, to civilize it, to make it their own, so it's a very [00:28:58] important time for that; 1845, before the gold rush, this

notion of manifest destiny emerges but there's nothing like the gold rush to really make it appear to [00:29:08] be a reality.

I'm reminded of the fact that it continues, this notion of manifest destiny. President Reagan said that he believed that the United States is [00:29:22] the last best hope of man on earth. If that isn't manifest destiny, I don't know what is, so this idea that we are somehow ordained [00:29:31] to manage this land for the sake of the world, to take our place in it and our piece of it is perhaps undying.

2 Maps

Levi's jeans

Levi's Brown Duck Trousers
1875-1895

How blue jeans used to look

These heavy brown duck trousers were worn in the late 1880s, probably by a teenage boy, and are one of the two earliest known pair of "Levi's." Such work pants were known as "jeans" because they were often made from a cheap, sturdy fabric known as "jean." Eventually, blue denim would become the standard.

<http://historywired.si.edu/object.cfm?ID=484>

Jewelry: Gold nugget watch and fob, 1886

A. W. Callen of Junction City, Kansas, had this watch and fob encrusted with nuggets from his Colorado gold mine. In 1886 he presented them to his children as birthday gifts. His daughter received the watch, set with four rubies and a diamond; his son received the fob, inscribed "with Love from his Father 'Old Grizzly.'" The pieces were handed down in the family to Robert Callen King, who bequeathed them to the Smithsonian in 1963.
<http://www.smithsonianlegacies.si.edu/objectdescription.cfm?ID=44>

Mormon Sunstone

Mormon "Sunstone" Sculpture
1844

Symbol of "the times and seasons of the last days"

A radiant face rising out of a bank of clouds and a pair of hand-held trumpets adorn this limestone capital from a Mormon Temple in Nauvoo, IL. It is one of 30 hand-carved, two-and-a-half-ton capitals that crowned pilasters encircling the temple before it burned down in 1848. Temple architect William Weeks probably based his designs for these "sunstones" on directions from church founder Joseph Smith. Carved temple stones

symbolized "the times and seasons of the last days" when heavenly beings--shown by the faces of the sunstones--are said to have visited Smith in a dream.

Notes

4' high, 6' wide, 18" thick

Catalog 1989.0553.01

Negative number: 90-13700

Cultural History, NMAH

<http://historywired.si.edu/object.cfm?ID=125>

Steamer Flyer

Annotation: This is an advertisement for a steamship to California. A ride on this steamship would have seemed highly appealing to people wanting to get to California quickly because a usual voyage on a ship to California made many stops and took several months to complete.

Rules and Regulations

Annotation: A common stereotype of life in the Wild West in the midst of the gold rush was one of lawlessness, moral depravity, and vigilantism. Here is an example of how this was not always true of the period and that a system of rules and regulations were in place from the beginning of the Gold Rush.

“Early Portrayal of a Miner”

“Pannin for Gold”

Annotation: Panning for gold was a common practice among gold seekers because it required less equipment, which meant one could start looking for gold as soon as they arrived in California. Panning for gold is done in rivers and streams. A miner would take his or her pan, place it in the water and fill it with gravel from the bottom of the river. Using circular motions, any trace of gold would sink to the bottom of the pan while loose gravel and dirt would move to the side. Although this technique was not equipment intensive, panning for gold was labor intensive and tedious and did not always yield a large return for one's efforts.

“Drilling Rig”

Annotation: This is a photograph of an early drilling rig in California. Drilling rigs are used to dig holes in the ground to create mine shafts.

“Miners at a mine opening”

Annotation: At first, mining for gold in California was done on an individual scale where one might pan for gold in a river or stream. Soon the need for a large-scale technique of mining arose and made the use of cradles and rockers popular. Cradles and rockers use the same concept that panning uses, but on a much larger scale. The success of this technique gave rise to other large scale mining operations, which included “hard-rock” mining. “Hard-rock” mining is when gold is extracted directly from the rock. This photograph of two miners standing in front of an opening of a mine is most likely the method of mining they used.

“Turned over wagon”

Annotation: Transporting mining supplies to the mines was difficult and wagons were not always efficient because of the rough terrain. Even though they could not carry as much as a wagon could, pack mules could handle the rough terrain and carry sizable amounts of equipment, which made them a favorable form of transportation for miners. In this photograph, a turned over wagon is depicted in the background with two pack mules in the foreground loaded up with supplies.

Travel Poster

Annotation: The journey to California was an arduous and long one. This advertisement would have been appealing to someone wanting to arrive in California as quickly as possible. Passengers on a stagecoach would have been permitted to bring a few pieces of luggage while enduring long hours in an uncomfortable coach through all kinds of overland terrain. The sense of urgency in this advertisement conveys the gold rush fever that swept the world and the urge to “rush” to California as quickly as possible to strike it rich. That sense of urgency appealed to thousands of people as they left behind their former lives in favor of a new one.

III. Object in the Museum

Q: Can you tell us how the nugget [00:02:00] came to be in the collection in the museum?

Response: The gold nugget is one of the oldest objects in the collections here. It arrived here in 1861. We have a very good paper [00:02:08] trail on it. We don’t know who collected it here but we do know who gave it to us. There’s a letter of transmittal from Captain [00:02:17] Joseph Folsom, a quartermaster in the U.S. Army and with it came the nugget. It’s a letter of transmittal transmitting the first piece of gold [00:02:27] found in northern California, the piece of gold that kicked off the gold rush.

Transmission Letter (image)

Sesquicentennial of the Gold Rush

Annotation: The Marshall Gold Discovery State Park celebrated the Sesquicentennial of James Marshall's discovery at Coloma, California in 1998. For this special occasion, the Smithsonian Institution permitted the original gold nugget to travel to the place at which it was first discovered with a museum curator. This would mark the first time the gold nugget had left the museum for any such occasion since the 1860s.

El Dorado Newspaper

Annotation: This image is a reproduction of a newspaper called the *El Dorado Miners Journal* printed in 1848. The article with the headline "Gold Discovered at Sutter's Mill" describes the local townspeople as unwilling "to place much importance on" Marshall's famous discovery of gold in January of 1848. Whether or not it is true that the locals were indifferent to the discovery, people from all around the world were certainly interested. This discovery incited a mass movement of tens of thousands of people to California and had lasting effects on the United States and the World.

1925 Request for the Gold Nugget

Annotation: In 1925 the Pioneer Society of California requested the Smithsonian to return the gold nugget to California so that it could be displayed at the California State Museum. The Smithsonian museum turned down the proposition. Below is the original letter of request for the gold nugget to be transferred back to California.

Executive Order

Annotation: This document is of the original Executive Order issued by the governor of California in 1994, Pete Wilson, authorizing a California Gold Discovery to Statehood Sesquicentennial Commission to be formed in preparation for the 1998 celebration of the California Gold Rush.

Q: I also have like a whole host of questions about [00:16:10] how you approach the nugget as a curator, like perhaps if you were to create a display with it now, what sorts of things would you want to put [00:16:20] with it?

Response: Over the years I've collected some really big machines, some hard hats, some clothing, shoes, tools of all kinds, but nothing as [00:16:33] small, physically small as the gold nugget. It's been here under our care since the 1860s. It will be here long after. It's gold and yet it's [00:16:42] really tiny, so what to do. I think the best way I'd like to display it would be in a dark case with the gold all by itself. We [00:16:56] have a tendency here to tell stories. The Smithsonian has become America's storyteller along with others, but here's a case [00:17:03] where we really have to abstract it for a moment

because it can easily get overwhelmed by whatever's around it. A gold pan, a pick, a miner's hat, [00:17:15] even a photograph of miners. Compared to those, this nugget looks insignificant. I think we need to get it away from all of that. This nugget [00:17:23] deserves to sit by itself in a dark case.

Q: I was also really interested in your story of taking the nugget back to Sutter's fort and so I was wondering [00:17:36] if you could tell us about that and your experiences with that and also sort of your confidence in it being the first find.

Response: Since the 1860s, the Smithsonian's [00:17:45] first find gold nugget from the gold rush has never [00:17:47] left the Smithsonian and that's been our policy because it's so delicate, so important, so small, we've not agreed to any loans outside [00:17:58] the Smithsonian, let alone outside Washington, D.C., but in 1998, on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the first find, January of that year, we relented. [00:18:14] Times had changed. Maybe our controls had grown stronger, but we relented and I escorted the gold nugget personally with an armed guard [00:18:25] by air to Coloma to the site, almost the very beach of its discovery. It was a thrilling moment in my career here to have that honor [00:18:36] to stand with the nugget, to sleep with the nugget in the hotel every night during its few days there. I kept it in a special case at my side [00:18:44] at all times until it was in its display case, a huge display case with this little yellow nugget in the center of it during the day right there [00:18:54] at the California State Museum in Coloma. What a thrill.

Q: And so I hear that there are competing claims to the first find nugget.

Response: Well, as with a [00:19:04] baseball star, there's always a contender, always a pretender to want to question the true authority. We have an immaculate paper [00:19:16] record of our nugget's lineage, its history, its provenance. However, there are other nuggets. Many pieces of gold were found in those [00:19:26] heady first days of January 1848 after Marshall had picked up this nugget. Other nuggets were found by his workmen, a Mormon cook, an assistant of [00:19:39] Marshall's. Others found their first nuggets. So we believe there are other qualifiers for that first generation of first find nuggets, first discovery [00:19:53] era, first discovery period, but ours is clearly the supreme first.

Q: That's true. [00:25:03] That is certainly true. The other question that I've sort of asked everyone who's sat in that chair is if you were sort of faced with [00:25:14] a group of visitors and you're looking at a display of the gold nugget, sort of what are the historical themes that you would like them to focus on and [00:25:26] with the knowledge that they walk away with from the exhibit.

Response: The gold nugget is a really beautiful example of the layers of meaning than an [00:25:33] object can have. Typically, there may be five or six meanings for a hat, for

a chair, for an earring, for an automobile. There's the story [00:25:44] of manufacture and design, the story of sales and marketing, the story of the materials the object is made from, the story of ownership and usage, [00:25:54] and then the story of the broader issues [00:26:00] an object brings up. In the case of the gold nugget, they're stark. They're absolutely stark. We have a vivid example here [00:26:05] of metallurgy. Gold is a metal. What are its properties? Why is it precious? Why do we care about gold? Why are coins made of it? What [00:26:16] about antiquity? The gold nugget for us opens up that story. It allows people, teenagers, families of all kinds, to start thinking seriously about [00:26:29] why does gold matter, why do any metals matter? Gold certainly isn't the most useful metal. It's not the most plentiful. Steel is a [00:26:39] great metal. So's iron, copper. What's up with gold, so I'd love, on one hand, to talk about gold, its distinction from the Egyptians to the [00:26:51] present day, but on the other hand, there's the gold rush. This is a catalyst for the gold rush. This kicks it off and so many stories, where to begin, [00:27:02] where to end involving the peoples of North America, the state of California, the state of the United States, and of course, all the folks who tried and succeeded, who tried and [00:27:13] failed, to become gold miners, so many— many layers of stories.