

History of Butte County

Until the magic wand of gold was waved o'er the land, drawing hither in a wild, tumultuous rush thousands and tens of thousands of eager adventurers from the four corners of the earth, that portion of California now under our consideration was but little known, save to the rude natives who had called it their home for ages. A few land grants and settlements had been made in the valley, but the mountains that bordered it, robed in green and crowned with snow, were as yet trackless, and as perfect as when they were issued from the great workshop of nature.

Capt. Louis A. Arguello, by order of the governor of California, explored this region in 1820, passing up the Sacramento river and penetrating to Fort Vancouver, on the Columbia river. He was, beyond a doubt, the first Caucasian to enter the limits of Butte County.

As has been seen elsewhere [see article on the Great Fur Companies], trappers penetrated this region at least as early as 1828. The party of Jedediah S. Smith, in 1827, passed up the valley to its head, then over the mountains to the coast, and thence to Oregon, though it is by no means certain they were within the limits of this county. The next winter a party under McLeod, trapped the upper Sacramento and its tributaries, including, no doubt, the Feather river and Butte creek, and came near perishing on the McLeod (McCloud) river that winter, which stream then received, and has since borne the name of that unfortunate leader. It is, then, extremely probable that the first representatives of English-speaking nations to view the flower-carpeted valley and pine-covered mountains of Butte county, were a party of American trappers, led by Jedediah S. Smith, or a party of Hudson Bay Company men, under the leadership of Alexander Roderick McLeod, in the winter of 1827- 8.

From that time till 1845, when the Hudson Bay Company withdrew beyond the Columbia river, scarcely a year passed by without representatives of that vast corporation, or parties of American trappers setting their traps in the streams of this region, camping beneath its noble oaks, and hunting the antelope, elk and deer that thronged the valley and mountains.

In the year 1838, the United States government sent out a fleet of vessels, under the command of Com. Charles Wilkes, on an extended voyage of exploration that lasted five years. In the month of September, 1841, a detachment of the expedition started on an overland trip from Vancouver to Yerba Buena (San Francisco), passing down the Hudson Bay trail and the Sacramento river. The party consisted of:- Lieut. George F. Emmons in command, Past Midshipman Henry Eld, Past Midshipman George W. Colvocoressis, Assistant Surgeon J. S. Whittle; Seamen, Doughty, Sutton, Waltham and Merzer; Sergeant Steams, Corporal Hughes, Privates Marsh and Smith ; T. R. Peale, naturalist; W. Eich, botanist ; James D. Dana, geologist; A. T. Agate, artist; J. D. Breckenridge, assistant botanist ; Baptiste Guardipii, guide ; Tibbats, Black, Warfields, Wood, Molair and Inass, mountaineers.

All this, however, tended not to develop the valley, nor to make it other than it then was, save by the interest created in the eastern haunts of the trappers by their tales of the loveliness of the great Sacramento valley, the fertility of its soil and the mildness of its climate. How these

stories induced emigration, the settlement at Sacramento, from which radiated others, and the final settlement of the whole valley, has already been related. [See Settlement of the Sacramento Valley.] It is at that point, then, that the history of Butte County properly commences.

In the month of July, 1843, some emigrants started from the neighborhood of Sacramento to go overland by the Hudson Bay trail to Oregon. At the same time they disappeared from view, also vanished some animals belonging to Capt. John A. Sutter, and the coincidence was so striking that John Bidwell, Peter Lassen, James Bruheim and an Indian associated the two events together in their minds and searched for the missing animals in the direction the party had taken, with the hope of finding them. The party was overtaken at Red Bluff, and the hope fully realized. This was the first trip any of the settlers about the junction of the American and Sacramento rivers had made to the upper end of the valley, and so pleased was Mr. Bidwell with the appearance of the country that he made an outline map of it upon his return to Sutter's Fort, upon which were marked the principal streams, with the names that nearly all of them now bear. From this map, a number of selections of land were made for the purpose of applying for land grants from the Mexican government.

The first grant made in this region was that to Peter Lassen, on Deer creek, lying partly in this county, but chiefly in Tehama. He settled upon it at the celebrated Lassen's ranch in the early spring of 1844. In the month of July, 1844, Edward A. Farwell and Thomas Fallen settled on the Farwell grant, the east line of which runs through the town of Chico. This was the first settlement within the present limits of Butte County, and the little habitation of these two men was the pioneer of the many fine mansions and happy homes to be seen on every side.

Later in the same year, Samuel Neal and David Dutton settled on the Esquon grant, on Butte creek, seven miles south of Chico. In 1845, William Dickey, Sanders and Yates located on the Dickey grant, now the property of Hon. John Bidwell, and known as the Rancho Arroyo Chico. Also James W. Marshall, the discoverer of gold in 1848, and Northgrave located on the grant to S. J. Hensley. That year, also, Charles Roether, familiarly known as Dutch Charley, settled on the Huber grant, on the north side of Honcut creek.

The discovery of gold on Feather river, in March, 1848, by John Bidwell, but two months after the discovery by Marshall at Coloma, was the beginning of a new era for this region. In the great rush of incoming gold-hunters in 1849, Feather river received its share, and soon every bar, ravine and gulch had its quota of industrious miners, while the smoke from their rude cabins, frail tents, and hastily-constructed brush shanties marked the river's course for miles. On the more important bars, mining-camps of considerable size sprang suddenly into existence, some of them becoming quite populous towns full of life and business, and containing many substantial buildings. Of these but few traces can now be found, save the one or two that have absorbed the others and prospered by the law of "the survival of the fittest." Their history, such as can now be traced, is given elsewhere in this volume.

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