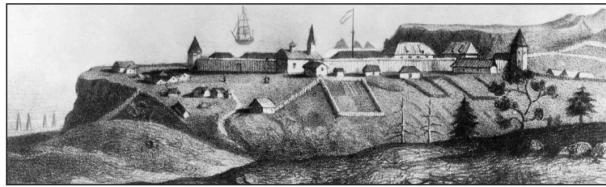


Foreign Penetration of California



No feature of the Mexican period in California had more far-reaching consequences than foreign penetration of the province. Prior to Mexican independence, Spain's colonial policies kept California essentially closed to foreign settlement, although contact with British, American, and Russian fur traders and whalers heightened interest in the area and, after 1810, encouraged a clandestine trade during the war for Mexican independence. A good deal was learned about California during these years, especially that it was an attractive land—and almost defenseless. Foreign observers were quick to see that Spain, and later Mexico, did not have a firm hold on the province. With independence, the bar to immigration was withdrawn and in the 1820s and '30s British and American hide-and-tallow traders made their way to California. These early immigrants were welcomed, became assimilated, and made important contributions to the region's economic development. In the same period a substantial number of beaver trappers, the "mountain men," migrated into the area, some of them remaining in various useful occupations. But the nature of foreign immigration changed dramatically when the American frontier movement reached California in 1841. Until then, neither Spain nor Mexico had successfully colonized California. Now the Americans threatened to do just that. Mexican authorities saw this threat, but were never strong enough to stop the migration.



Fort Ross, circa 1830

Cut off from expansion inland by Mexican development of the Sonoma region, the Russians sold the fort to John Sutter in 1841. *Courtesy of the California History Room, California State Library, Sacramento, California.*

The Russians in California

The establishment of the Russian colony at Fort Ross, not far from San Francisco, in 1812 was an early sign of Spain's weakness. In 1806 Count Nikolai Rezanov visited San Francisco seeking supplies for the starving and scurvy-ridden outpost of the Russian-American Fur Company at Sitka, Alaska. Trade with foreigners was illegal, but his betrothal to Concepción Argüello, the daughter of San Francisco's *comandante*, helped him to secure the provisions he sought. Unhappily, Rezanov died on the return trip to Russia. The young Concepción faithfully waited years for his return before learning of his death; their love affair provided raw material for new romantic California literature. Rezanov's visit also led to the establishment of a Russian settlement north of San Francisco as a base for shipping food to the Alaskan fur-trading posts and for hunting sea otter and seals along the California coast. In 1810 Ivan Kuskov scouted the Bodega Bay area and returned two years later to establish Fort Ross, a picturesque wooden structure on a bluff near the sea. Using Bodega Bay as their port, the Russians ultimately extended their influence several miles inland and employed several hundred Alaskan Aleut hunters along the coast and in San Francisco Bay, and more than 200 California Pomo Indian farm workers. Ignoring Spanish orders to leave, Kuskov supplied manufactured implements, utensils, furniture, and boats to Native and Hispanic traders in return for foodstuffs.

But several factors prevented the Russian foothold in California from prospering. The climate of Fort Ross was unsuited to raising wheat and the colony could never meet the needs of the Alaskan trading posts. In addition, expansion inland was blocked by Mexican

enterprises, a declining sea otter population made the fur trade unprofitable, and Mexico's relaxing of trade restrictions reduced their need for the settlement. By 1839, Fort Ross had become a losing proposition. Also, by then the Russians believed that California would ultimately be absorbed by the United States. In 1841, they sold out to John A. Sutter.

A few other foreigners made their way to California before 1820, but their arrival was typically more accidental than intentional. In 1814, for example, an English ship dumped John Gilroy, an ailing Scottish sailor, in Monterey. Later baptized and naturalized, he married a daughter of Ignacio Ortega and became a *ranchero*; the present-day town of Gilroy bears his name. In all, probably no more than 20 foreigners took up permanent residence in California in the Spanish period, and they were soon absorbed by the local population.

The Hide-and-Tallow Traders

Mexico's opening of the ports of San Diego and Monterey to trade also opened the door to substantial additional foreign settlement. Beginning with Hartnell and Gale in 1822, the hide-and-tallow trade brought 15 to 20 new foreign settlers each year. Some, like Gilroy, became residents by force of circumstance, leaving no memorable record, but many others were essential to the successful development of California's commerce, especially since Californians lacked both the experience and the inclination to manage commercial affairs. With few exceptions, hide-and-tallow traders were assimilated into the local elite. They became Catholics and naturalized citizens, arranged marriages with *ranchero* families that gave them access to land,

Hispanicized their names, and adopted California ways and dress.

William E. P. Hartnell was typical of the resident business agent. He came to California after two years with John Begg & Co. in Peru, converted to Catholicism, married Maria Teresa de la Guerra, and acquired Rancho Patrocino del Alisal, 20 miles inland from Monterey. Naturalized in 1830, he held numerous civil posts. His most important assignment, as *visitador de misiones* of the secularized missions, proved to be a hopeless effort to stem the tide of plunder following secularization. A cultivated man who spoke French, German, and Spanish fluently, Hartnell became one of the most respected foreign residents of Mexican California. Many others followed Hartnell's example—among them William G. Dana, Henry Delano Fitch, and John R. Cooper (all Yankee sea captains of the trade), Alfred Robinson, and William Heath Davis, Jr., each of whom contributed to stronger economic ties with the United States.

Abel Stearns, another New Englander turned Californian, was naturalized in Mexico, entered California in 1829, and went into business selling hides and spirits in Los Angeles. Not a handsome man, he was known as Cara de Caballo, or "Horseface," but this did not prevent him from winning the hand of a southern California beauty, Doña Arcadia Bandini. Stearns's business flourished, he acquired huge landholdings, and he became the wealthiest man in southern California, also holding a number of important local offices. He was almost unique in being childless.

Like Stearns, Hugo Reid, a Scotsman, came to California in the early 1830s from Mexico and became prominent in southern California affairs. Reid wed a Tongva neophyte the missionaries named "Victoria." She received a sizable land grant from Mexico, and Reid obtained Rancho Santa Anita for himself. He devoted his attention to Indian customs and wrote some of the earliest criticism of the mission system, based largely on Doña Victoria's own childhood experiences at Mission San Gabriel.

Thomas Oliver Larkin was a singular exception to the pattern of assimilation of the hide-and-tallow trade immigrants in that he did not become naturalized. He came to California in 1832 and in the following year married Rachel Hobson Holmes, whom he had met on board ship. (She thus became the first American woman to reside in California.) Settling in Monterey, Larkin became perhaps the most successful merchant in the province, establishing close relations with Mexican officials, and lending money to the hard-pressed government. Yet he did not particularly sympathize

with Mexican rule and in later years worked for American acquisition of California. Larkin did not become a *ranchero*, although he dealt in real estate, but he built a fine house in Monterey, pioneering the "Monterey" style of architecture. So successful were his dealings in merchandise, lumber, and real estate that his sight drafts on funds he had on deposit in the United States circulated like banknotes in currency-starved California. Although remaining an American citizen, Larkin became a respected and influential figure in California affairs. In 1843 President John Tyler appointed him U.S. consul in Monterey, and, in 1845, President James K. Polk appointed him as a confidential federal agent. Larkin's lengthy dispatches and observations are an important resource for the history of the period.

Like Hartnell, Stearns, and Larkin, most foreigners connected with the hide-and-tallow trade performed a valuable function in the cattle economy. They were, in fact, encouraged to become permanent residents through such devices as the Mexican colonization laws of 1824 and 1828, which made naturalized citizens eligible for land grants. Welcome additions to the ranks of the Californios, many occupied prestigious positions in the province.

The Mountain Men

The arrival of the mountain men was viewed in a decidedly different light. Seemingly safe from American expansionism behind the wall of the Sierra Nevada and the deserts of the Southwest, Mexican residents were justifiably alarmed when Jedediah Smith breached these barriers, appearing with a large group of men at Mission San Gabriel in 1826. Smith's feat was the direct result of the rendezvous fur-trade system, whereby beaver trappers exchanged pelts for merchandise at an annual meeting in the Rocky Mountains. This extended their range some 1,500 miles, and brought Smith into California.

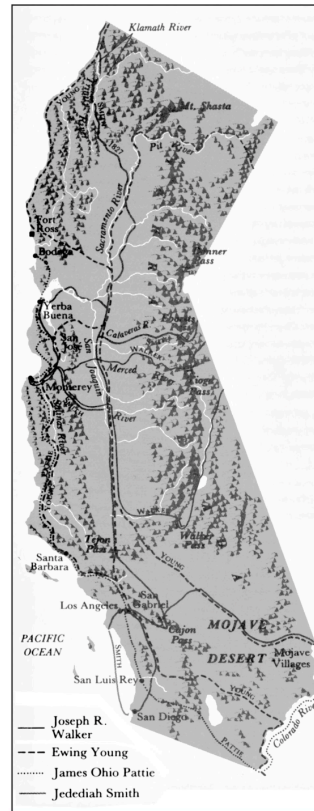
Jedediah Smith was a literate, observant young man, in addition to possessing the heroic qualities so often associated with his kind. His account of the 1826 expedition lay forgotten in an attic until its discovery in 1967. A fascinating story of the opening of California to the American frontier movement, it was published in 1977 as *The Southwest Expedition of Jedediah S. Smith: His Personal Account of the Journey to California, 1826–1827*. In partnership with William L. Sublette and David E. Jackson, Smith took over the Rocky Mountain Fur Company in 1826 and launched an expedition through the Great Basin (probably the least-known part

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of North America at the time) to the Southwest to open new beaver country. Leaving the rendezvous, Smith and 17 men traveled south to the Great Salt Lake and then southwest to the Colorado River. At the Mojave villages, near the present-day town of Needles, Smith decided to push west into California, making his way through the Mojave Desert to an outlying rancho of Mission San Gabriel in November 1826, guided by two neophytes who had fled from the mission. He announced his arrival in a note to Father José Bernardo Sanchez requesting his permission to replenish his supplies. Smith received a reply in Latin, prompting him to observe that “as I could not read his Latin nor he my english [sic] it seemed we were not likely to become general correspondents.”

Nevertheless, the amiable Father Sanchez welcomed Smith’s party, providing them with comfortable quarters and good food while Smith traveled on to San Diego for permission to trade and hunt beaver. Seeing Smith’s arrival as a dangerous sign, Governor Echeandía detained him for six weeks then released him with instructions to leave California the way he had come. Smith departed from San Gabriel in January 1827, retracing his path until he passed through the San Gabriel Mountains at Cajon Pass. There he turned north, asserting that he had fulfilled the governor’s instructions. He crossed the Tehachapi Mountains through the old Tejon Pass, picking up runaway mission Indians as guides. Trapping in the San Joaquin Valley through the end of March, Smith left most of his party on the Stanislaus River and, with two men, crossed the Sierra Nevada at present-day Ebbets Pass, claiming distinction as the first white men to do so. After a harrowing trek across the parched Great Basin, Smith reached the 1827 rendezvous at Bear Lake, in northern Utah.

Mindful of the men he had left at the Stanislaus River, Smith was off again within ten days. Following his route of the previous year, Smith, 18 men, and two Indian women traveled without incident until the Mojave villages. There, the Mojave, peaceful the year before, attacked as Smith’s company as it crossed the river, killing the women and ten men and wounding several others. The survivors limped into San Gabriel, where Smith obtained horses and supplies and hurried north to join the company he had left at the Stanislaus River the year before. In need of supplies, Smith rode into Mission San José for assistance, but Father Durán seized him and packed him off to Governor Echeandía, then on one of his infrequent visits to Monterey. Echeandía clapped him in jail, but soon released him on the condition that Smith and his trappers leave California.



Routes of the Mountain Men

Making the first recorded overland journey up the coast of California into Oregon, Smith reached the Umpqua River in mid-July, where Indians killed all but Smith and two others in his party. The survivors fled to the Hudson's Bay Company post at Fort Vancouver. Smith returned to hunting and trapping in the Rockies. In May 1831, Comanches left him dead on the Santa Fe Trail.

Jedediah Smith was in California for only two brief periods, yet he had a major impact on the state's history. It was he who first opened California to the east, bringing it within reach of the American frontier movement. He was the first to cross the Sierra Nevada and to travel between the Sierra and Great Salt Lake, and he opened a trail between California and Oregon that was soon improved and traveled by Hudson's Bay Company trappers. A pious, thoughtful young man, his descriptions of the terrain he covered and the people he saw are a unique contribution to the history of western America.

Other mountain men soon followed. In 1827, James Ohio Pattie and his father, Sylvester, joined a party heading down the Gila River to the Colorado. Emerging in Baja California, south of San Diego, missionaries turned them over to Governor Echeandia. His worst fears now being realized, the governor threw the Patties in prison, where Sylvester Pattie died. James later claimed that he had brought with him a supply of smallpox vaccine and was freed on the condition that he distribute it to the Californios. Pattie recounted his experiences in *The Personal Narratives of James Ohio Pattie*, published in 1831. Although it blurred fact with fiction, the *Narrative* was significant for bringing California to the attention of American readers.

A less colorful, but nevertheless important, figure in the list of mountain men who threw open the doors to California was Ewing Young. Like the Patties, Young worked out of Santa Fe, New Mexico. He helped develop an overland desert trail to California known as the "Old Spanish Trail" that ran from Santa Fe to the Mission San Gabriel. In the 1830s Young brought large trapping parties into California, ranging all the way north to Oregon and the Klamath Lake region. Several of the men in Young's expeditions elected to stay in California under the liberalized Mexican colonization laws of 1828, which encouraged foreign settlement. Among them was Isaac Williams; by the end of the Mexican period, his Rancho Santa Ana del Chino gave him an income then calculated at \$30,000 per year. Jonathan Trumbull Warner and William Wolfskill also became prominent, while others found new occupations in the pueblos. The newcomers merged with an unassimilated and unpredictable floating population of foreigners that was con-

temptuous of Mexican authority and often participated in the region's frequent political turnovers. In 1840 Governor Alvarado sent Isaac Graham, a particularly notorious member of this group, to Mexico in chains, along with several dozen of his cohorts. The severity of this punishment indicates the level of menace Mexican officials saw in the intruders.

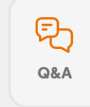
The opening of a central route over the Sierra was pioneered by Joseph Reddeford Walker in 1833. Leading a large force of trappers, he crossed the Great Basin to the Humboldt River, proceeded across the desert, and came to the lake and river east of the Sierra that now bear his name. Following the river, Walker's party made the first east-to-west crossing of the Sierra. His was probably the first such group to see the region's giant sequoias and the grandeur of Yosemite Valley. Thousands of migrants would later follow Walker route into California.

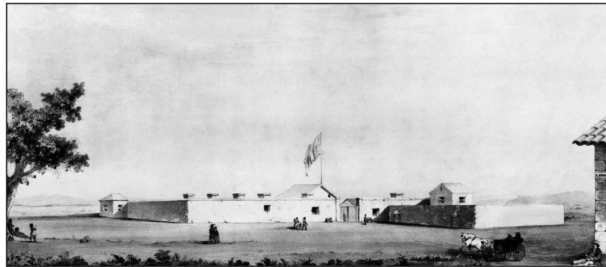
The importance of the mountain men to California history cannot be exaggerated. They blazed the trails that opened the region to the east, publicized its glories to a reading public, and led the first American settlers over the Sierra passes and the Old Spanish Trail. More than any others they brought the American frontier movement, with all its potential for disruption of the romantic rancho era, to the "land of promise" in the Far West.

Mavericks

Two nonconformists who came to California in the 1830s, "Dr." John Marsh and John A. Sutter, made important contributions to the penetration of the province by the American frontier movement. Marsh came from Santa Fe in 1836. A graduate of Harvard University, he convinced local residents that his bachelor of arts degree was a certificate to practice medicine, and began a career as a doctor in Los Angeles, accepting hides in payment of his fees. In 1837 he purchased a large rancho on the eastern slope of Mount Diablo, across the bay from San Francisco, where he lived a reclusive life. His primary importance was as a publicist. Convinced that California could be another Texas, the articulate Marsh wrote dozens of letters extolling the country's virtues to acquaintances in the East. Widely published in the Midwest, his letters stimulated a significant movement of settlers to California.

John Sutter, originally Johann Augustus Sutter, was a Swiss émigré who, in 1834, left bad debts, an unhappy wife, and several children behind to seek his fortune in America. After spending some time in the fur trade in the Rocky Mountains and St. Louis, he came to California by way of Hawaii, Alaska, and eventually Oregon.





Sutter's Fort

Sutter's fort dominated the interior of northern California in the 1840s. Sutter encouraged and protected American frontier settler migration from 1841 to 1846. Ironically, when John C. Frémont placed one of his men in charge of the fort at the time of the Bear Flag Revolt, Sutter became a virtual prisoner in his own house. *Courtesy of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.*

Upon arrival he wangled a huge grant of land in the unoccupied Sacramento Valley, as well as extensive civil authority from Governor Alvarado, who appointed him local military commander and judge "to represent . . . all the laws of the country in the area." Selecting a site at the junction of the Sacramento and American rivers, Sutter in time developed a little barony that he called New Helvetia. As the Spanish had before him, Sutter relied on local Natives as laborers and trading partners. An element of compulsion sometimes marred these relationships. As Isidora Filomena Solano recalled, "Sutter forced the Jalquineros to exchange hides and dried fish for liquor."

In 1841 Sutter bought out the Russians at Fort Ross for a trifling down payment and a large promise to pay. With the cannon from Fort Ross, Sutter erected his own fort, which not only was a major defensive bulwark against Indian raids, but also made him largely independent of Mexican control. He established a large cattle and sheep business, planted a sizable wheat crop, built a grist mill and a distillery, and employed large numbers of Hawaiians, Californios, and Natives.

Sutter's importance to the development of California, however, is not merely the result of his colorful character and independent feudal domain. New Helvetia lay at the terminus of the main westward trails. Sutter encouraged American migration along these trails and frequently

sent supplies east over the Sierra to emigrant parties in trouble, receiving them with warm hospitality when they arrived. He gave them work, sold them land, leased them Indian laborers, gave them passports, and otherwise promoted the advance of the American frontier.

Frontier Settlers

By 1840 California had a permanent foreign resident population of perhaps 350, almost all of them men who came with the hide-and-tallow trade or in search of beaver. For the most part, they had been accepted and assimilated by the local society, but the growing number of former mountain men such as Isaac Graham and his friends created some anxiety among officials. Then, in 1841, a portentous change occurred as the American frontier movement began to make its way over the Sierra.

The appearance of land-hungry American farm families stemmed from the activities of the mountain men, the repeated and glowing reports of California's attractions, the pressures of the depression years of the 1830s, and British-American rivalry in the Northwest. The United States' claim to Oregon in particular attracted the attention of frontier settlers, and in the 1840s migration along the Oregon Trail increased rapidly. Until 1849 the number of pioneers moving to Oregon was eight to ten times the number coming to California, but

the movement along the Oregon Trail stimulated interest in California as well.

The first organized company of frontier settlers to leave Missouri for California was the Bidwell-Bartleson party of 1841. In 1840, letters from John Marsh and speeches by trapper Antoine Robidoux excited enough interest to result in the Western Emigration Society, some 500 people who pledged to assemble the next spring at Sapling Grove, on the Missouri River, and go to California. In the spring of 1841, only one of the original members of the society, former teacher John Bidwell, appeared at the designated meeting place. Sixty-eight new members eventually joined him and then elected John Bartleson as captain of the company.

Despite warnings against overland travel to California that Mexican authorities published in U.S. newspapers, the Bidwell-Bartleson pioneers began their six-month odyssey on May 19, 1841, under the guidance of mountain man Thomas "Broken Hand" Fitzpatrick. The journey was untroubled until they reached Soda Springs, the turning point for California. Half of the group decided to go on to Oregon with Fitzpatrick, and the remaining 34 headed for California. The party included one woman, 18-year-old Nancy Roberts Kelsey and her 18-month-old daughter, Martha Ann; her infant son had died only three months earlier. When her husband Ben announced his intention to migrate to California, Nancy was determined to go too. "Where my husband goes, I go," she later said. "I can better endure the hardships of the journey than the anxieties for an absent husband."

In mid-August the company turned south to follow the Bear River. In the blazing desert west of the Great Salt Lake they were forced to abandon their wagons and pack everything on horses, mules, and even several oxen. The party stumbled upon the headwaters of the Humboldt and followed its path across Nevada. Nancy rode bareback, holding her baby. Occasionally, Paiutes blocked their path. "At one place the Indians surrounded us, armed with bows and arrows," said Nancy, "but my husband leveled his gun at the chief and made him order his Indians out of arrow range."

The company next reached the sink of the Humboldt near present-day Lovelock and began a grueling 40-mile trek across the desert. Crossing the Walker River, low on food and nearly exhausted, they began the climb into the Sierra Nevada, which Bidwell described as "naked mountains whose summits still retained the snows of perhaps a thousand years." Unable to locate either the Carson or Sonora passes, the emigrants managed to force their way over the steep eastern slopes of the Sierra, which they finally crested on October

18. Fortunate that the snows were late that year, they nevertheless found themselves facing a new challenge. Recalled Nancy:

We had a difficult time to find a way down the mountain. At one time I was left alone for nearly a day, and as I was afraid of the Indians, I sat all the while with my baby in my lap on the back of my horse. . . . It seemed to me while I was there alone the moaning of the wind through the pines was the loneliest sound I ever heard.

When they found the path, the descent was so steep they were forced to walk. "At one place," Nancy said, "four pack animals fell over a bluff." They killed and ate the cattle when their provisions ran out. Nancy walked barefoot, her shoes worn through. They eventually found the Stanislaus River and followed it down into the San Joaquin Valley. On November 4, 1841, the Bidwell party finally arrived at the ranch of Dr. John Marsh near Mt. Diablo. Marsh sold them meat and flour at what they considered exorbitant prices and, also for a stiff fee, obtained passports for them from reluctant Mexican authorities. When the party subsequently dispersed, several, including Bidwell, went to work for Sutter, whose generous treatment of them contrasted sharply with Marsh's. Bidwell later acquired the Rancho Chico north of Sacramento and eventually became one of the state's leading citizens. Five months pregnant at the end of the trail, Nancy Kelsey became the first woman to cross overland to California from the United States. Her fortitude inspired the men. Fellow traveler Joseph Chiles said "she bore the fatigue of the journey with so much heroism, patience and kindness, that there still exists a warmth in every heart for the mother and her child."

Not long after the Bidwell party arrived, another group arrived from Santa Fe under the leadership of William Workman and John Rowland. Some 25 Americans, in company with New Mexican traders, followed the Old Spanish Trail to southern California, where they had little difficulty in obtaining permission to settle. Workman and Rowland, along with another member of the group, Benjamin D. Wilson, became prominent rancheros in the Los Angeles area. Wilson, known as Don Benito, married Ramona Yorba (whose father owned the Rancho Santa Ana) founded the town of Alhambra, and was the second mayor of the city of Los Angeles. The nearby Mount Wilson is named for him. That same year the first small group of what became a substantial movement of pioneers from Oregon made their way down from the north. The ease



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with which the migrants of 1841 obtained permission to settle illustrates the breakdown of Mexican authority in the province. After the Texas revolution of 1836, Mexico looked with disfavor on American migration to its territories, yet the ability and willingness of local officials to grant passports (often for profit) undermined government policy.

No organized groups of migrants arrived in 1842, but the movement resumed in 1843, when Lansford W. Hastings arrived with part of a group of settlers he had taken to Oregon the year before. In the same year, Joseph B. Chiles, who had come with Bidwell and returned east in 1842, recruited a party of about 50 that he took along the Oregon Trail to Fort Hall. From there, Chiles and some ten men proceeded to California via the Pit River, while the remaining settlers, led by the veteran Joseph Reddeford Walker, came south by way of the Owens Valley and Walker Pass. The year 1844 saw the first wagons roll across the Sierra and what was to be the main route to California, opened when the Stevens-Murphy party crossed the mountains over what is now called Donner Pass.

To this point the migration to Mexican California, while unwelcome, had been insignificant. In 1845, however, this changed as more than 250 Americans poured over the Sierra. Among them were half a dozen large groups such as the Grigsby-Idle party of 50 men and their families. Moreover, they brought with them reports that thousands more planned to make the trek the next year. In fact, some 1,500 did.

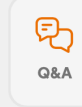
The pioneers of 1846 arrived to find California already in American hands. The most famous overland group, the Donner party, was one of these groups. A large company of some 87 men, women, and children, the Donner party suffered from inexperience, lack of leadership, dissension, and delay. Their first mistake was attempting the so-called Hastings Cut-Off, leaving the Oregon Trail to travel south of the Great Salt Lake, which proved to be a difficult and time-consuming journey. With delays occasioned by disagreements and dawdling, the party arrived too late in the year at the Truckee River, nearly 6,000 feet high in the Sierras. There they were trapped by heavy snowfall. Demoralized, short of supplies, and without effective leadership, they failed to make the crossing and remained snowbound on Alder Creek and Donner Lake, where 39 died and some of the starving members were reduced to cannibalism. Relief parties organized at San Francisco and Sutter's Fort finally managed to bring 45 survivors over the mountains. Their story became a source of morbid fascination for future generations.

Mexican authorities were alarmed by the sudden increase in American immigration. Propagandists such as Lansford Hastings, who published his fanciful *Emigrant's Guide* in 1844, were boldly promoting settlement in California, and the new immigrants were not so easily absorbed into California society as earlier ones. The farm families who settled in the interior were reluctant to become Mexican citizens or Catholics. Whether they bought or rented land, claimed rights to questionable land grants, or simply squatted on lands already granted to others, the newcomers constituted a growing threat to Mexican control of the interior. They were doing what Spain and Mexico had never been able to do: colonize California. Dismayed but helpless, Mexican authorities seemed unable to stop them.

The Breakdown of Mexican Government

Increasing evidence of Mexico's inability to control affairs in California foreshadowed the end of the Mexican period. Governor Alvarado's administration had been characterized by rapid development of the rancho economy and the hide-and-tallow trade as the mission system was dismantled, and by relative political stability. Sectional rivalry over the location of the capital and customs house continued but, for the most part, Alvarado successfully avoided conflict over these issues. He did, however, fall into disagreement with General Vallejo, his uncle (though only two years his senior), over the military capabilities of the government. Vallejo, who despaired of disciplining "an army of unpaid relatives and friends," bombarded Mexico City with reports urging the strengthening of defenses and calling for a reunited political and military authority, a plan that Alvarado opposed.

Late in 1842 Mexico responded to Vallejo's entreaties by appointing General Manuel Michelorena as governor and *comandante general*, replacing Alvarado and Vallejo. An attractive and gracious man, Michelorena arrived with a force of 300 men to bolster the defenses of the province. Unfortunately, this army consisted mostly of ex-convicts and, as usual, the governor could not pay them. Consequently, they took to foraging, which outraged the local population. Although Michelorena attempted with some success to administer California, he could never overcome the rampages of his convict army or the fact that he was an outsider. In November 1844, another "revolution" broke out, engineered, as in 1836, by Alvarado and José Castro with support from southern Californians



led by Pío Pico. Both sides had foreign contingents in their forces. Micheltorena was supported by Sutter and a motley group under Isaac Graham, who still smarted from his treatment by Alvarado in 1840. Castro, Pico, and Alvarado were joined by foreigners in the south, including Stearns, Workman, and Rowland. The armies confronted each other at Caluenga Pass in February 1845 in an artillery duel that killed a horse and wounded a mule. When the foreigners on both sides held a meeting and agreed to refrain from combat, Micheltorena's support vanished, and he agreed to leave California with his soldiers. He was replaced by another regime that returned to the principle of separation of civil and military authority. Pío Pico, as senior member of the *diputación*, became interim governor, while José Castro assumed the position of *comandante general*. As the Bear Flag Revolt revealed, this arrangement merely heightened sectional rivalry and further weakened Mexican authority.

Probably no issue was more important, or better demonstrated the weakness of government in California, than the Indian problem. All through the Mexican period, the Indians of the interior periodically drove off large numbers of horses from the mission and rancho herds, as well as cattle that they slaughtered for hides. During the 1830s the Indian raids were so serious in the San Diego district that most of the ranchos there were periodically abandoned. The California population declined by almost 50 percent.

Efforts to control the Indians were never really successful. In the north, Vallejo spent years chasing Indians as far as the Tuolumne and Stanislaus rivers after raids on local missions and ranchos. Sutter's records recount many punitive expeditions after Indians who had stolen his horses and burned his fields.

The political turmoil and military weakness did not go unnoticed by foreigners. In April 1846, Thomas Larkin wrote his unofficial vice-consul in San Francisco, William Leidesdorff, that "the pear is near ripe for the falling." Most observers expected it to fall into American hands.

American Interest

Since the 1820s the United States had looked westward with an acquisitive eye and acted to protect its western territorial interests. The Monroe Doctrine of 1823 was in part an effort to maintain these interests against Russian encroachment, and led in 1824 to an agreement in which Russia relinquished its claims south of 54°40' north latitude, while the United States abandoned its

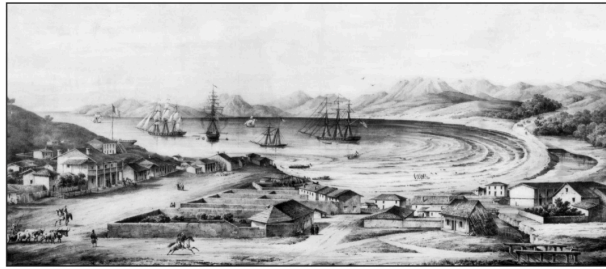
claims north of that line. At the same time, American fur companies such as those of William Ashley and Jedediah Smith competed with the British Hudson's Bay Company for furs and national hegemony in the Pacific Northwest. In the process they opened the Northwest, particularly Oregon, to the American frontier movement.

In the 1830s a number of developments sharpened American interest in California. Texas, for one, was very much on the minds of Americans and Mexicans. After the revolution of 1836, Texas remained independent for almost ten years, but annexation by the United States was continually under consideration. The issue muddied political waters in Mexico and the United States for many years and fueled the American expansionist impulse. In the 1830s the American government began to focus its attention more directly on California. In 1835 Andrew Jackson offered Mexico half a million dollars for San Francisco Bay and the territory north of it without success. He also tried to use Texas's revolt against Mexico as an opportunity to negotiate for the area from San Francisco north, but again failed. Interest in the region remained high, however, and the United States began to send military exploration parties to wander, sometimes uninvited, in and out of Mexican territory, specifically California. A naval expedition led by Lieutenant Charles Wilkes spent the years 1838 to 1842 on the West Coast, charting the waters and observing conditions there. While ostensibly devoted to surveys in the interest of the whaling industry, Wilkes's expedition included a sizable party that went overland from Oregon to San Francisco through the Sacramento Valley. At the same time, a great deal of concern was expressed over the Isaac Graham affair, and American naval forces in the area were strengthened.

A good deal of this activity was a reaction to the interest of other countries in the "ripening pear" on the Pacific. In 1839, Alexander Forbes, British vice-consul in Tepic, Mexico, published his *History of California*, the first English-language book on the territory, in which he proposed that Mexico's British creditors cancel Mexican bonds and take over California in return. Sir George Simpson of the Hudson's Bay Company seemed to endorse this plan when he visited San Francisco in 1841. Many other such plans were voiced freely by British representatives in the West—to the consternation of Americans such as Larkin who worked to prevent such schemes, whether British, French, or Russian. Actually, the British government never took the suggestions of its western agents seriously, and British policy did not include any suggestion of seeking control of California aggressively. Still, Anglo-American rivalry in Oregon

Q&A icon





The Pueblo of Monterey, 1842

This lithograph portrays California's capital, Monterey, at the time of the arrival of the U.S. Squadron of the Pacific under Commodore Thomas ap Catesby Jones. Decades after its founding, Monterey, now under Mexican authority, still bore the marks of the rude frontier life in Hispanic California. The harbor lacks wharf facilities, and the pueblo's houses are scattered and virtually devoid of ornamental greenery. Walls confine household livestock—and guard against the ever-present danger of Indian attack. *Courtesy of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.*

and the Americans' traditional Anglophobia contributed to the persistent belief that the British were maneuvering to do so.

Interest continued, therefore, in negotiating with Mexico for the cession of California, or part of it, to the United States. In fact, Daniel Webster, secretary of state under President John Tyler, worked out a complicated deal in 1842 by which the United States would pay Mexican debts to British and American creditors in return for Texas and part of California and Oregon as far north as the Columbia River. This tripartite arrangement was opposed by American expansionists who objected to giving up the territory north of the Columbia. When Commodore Thomas ap Catesby Jones seized the port of Monterey in October 1842, in the mistaken belief that war had broken out, the plan collapsed. Jones learned he was in error within hours and retired with apologies, but his action was a clear signal of American intentions.

The election of James K. Polk as president in 1844 made it even more obvious that the spirit of Manifest Destiny was reaching a climax in the United States. Polk, a protégé of Andrew Jackson, shared his predecessor's distrust of British intentions and had campaigned for the presidency on a platform of aggressive expansionism and resistance to British imperialism in

America. This meant primarily the annexation of Texas and occupation of the disputed Oregon territory, but Polk, supported by a growing clamor in the American press, made it clear that he also intended to acquire California. Like presidents before him, Polk attempted to acquire the region by purchase, sending John Slidell to Mexico with an offer of up to \$40 million for Upper California and New Mexico. At the same time he took another tack, probably well aware that Slidell's mission had no real chance of success. In 1845 he appointed Consul Larkin a "confidential agent" with instructions to try to persuade Californians to declare their independence from Mexico and seek the protection of the United States.

It took six months for Larkin's appointment letter to reach Monterey, but once it arrived in April 1846 Larkin energetically went to work. He enlisted the aid of important foreign residents, including General Vallejo's brother-in-law Jacob Leese in Sonoma, Abel Stearns in Los Angeles, and J.J. Warner in San Diego. Since the Californians had always resented Mexican interference in their affairs, many, including even General Vallejo, were also receptive to Larkin's proposals. However, John Charles Frémont's sudden arrival on the scene quickly triggered a series of events that made Larkin's plan superfluous.

John C. Frémont

Few Americans captured the imagination of their time as completely as did John C. Frémont. Although of illegitimate birth, he obtained a commission in the Army Corps of Topographical Engineers and won the hand of the beautiful Jessie, daughter of Thomas Hart Benton, the powerful expansionist U.S. senator from Missouri. After leading five major expeditions into the American West, Frémont wrote and published reports, with the aid of his talented and ambitious wife, which profoundly affected Americans. Containing masterful descriptions of the flora, fauna, and geology of the regions he traversed, and carefully mapped routes for future migrants, Frémont's reports particularly appealed to a generation of Americans moved by the spirit of Manifest Destiny. These accounts also made Frémont a romantic hero; he and his wife achieved a popularity enjoyed by no other couple of the age.

For two decades Frémont—a natural showman, an adventurer, and an opportunist whose ambition and ego were almost boundless—was a prominent national figure. He was one of the first two U.S. senators from California, first presidential candidate of the newly founded Republican Party, and, as a Civil War general, one of the first to attempt to free southern slaves. He was criticized as merely a follower of the trails that others blazed, court-martialed for his refusal to obey army orders, and forced by Lincoln to curtail his efforts to emancipate slaves in his Missouri command. He also resigned his commission before the Civil War was over and engaged in political maneuvers that almost cost Lincoln his reelection. Historians have tended to view him as either a hero or a scoundrel, but, in either case, his significance to the American westward movement is undeniable.

Frémont's second and third expeditions were probably even more significant than his first. In 1843 and 1844, he traveled west to the Columbia River, turned south, and crossed the Sierra by way of Carson Pass in the middle of winter. After resting at Sutter's Fort, Frémont's company traveled the length of the San Joaquin Valley, crossed Tehachapi Pass to the Mojave Desert, followed the Old Spanish Trail into southern Utah, and then struck out for St. Louis by way of the Sevier River and Bent's Fort on the Arkansas River. From November 1843 to July 1844, no word was heard in the East from Frémont, and anxiety for the "lost expedition" mounted. When he emerged from the wilderness and published his report of the journey, it became an immediate popular success and the chief source of information for would-be migrants.

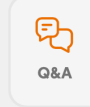
In 1845, Frémont set off on his third expedition, this time to map the trail west through the Rocky Mountains. It was not in his instructions to enter California, but he did. One section of his company crossed the Sierra at Walker Pass in the south, while Frémont led another group up the Truckee River and over Donner Pass, arriving at Sutter's Fort in early December. His arrival sparked the chain of events that culminated in the Bear Flag incident, which itself can be considered the beginning of the Mexican War in California. When Frémont assumed command of the Bears, he positioned himself to play an important role in that war.

The Prize of War

In March 1845, Congress finally adopted a joint resolution to annex Texas. Along with Texas, the United States also acquired its new territory's disputes with Mexico, particularly one involving its western and southern border. Texans had themselves been expansionists, some envisioning a Texas that encompassed all of the Southwest and California. In any event, by 1845, Texans claimed a western and southern border that ran the length of the Rio Grande del Norte, from its mouth to its source. Mexico asserted that the border was on the traditional line, the Nueces River, and prepared to occupy the ground between the two rivers. Congress's resolution of annexation was silent on the matter. James K. Polk's election to the presidency in 1844 brought an unabashed expansionist to power in the United States. Polk supported the Rio Grande line and sent General Zachary Taylor to the region with instructions to regard a Mexican crossing of the Rio Grande as an act of war. When Polk signed the resolution admitting Texas to the Union as the 28th state in December 1845, both sides prepared for war.

In the spring of 1846, as José Castro and John C. Frémont moved toward their own fateful confrontations, Mexican and American soldiers jockeyed along the disputed Texas border. Finally, in May, American forces under Taylor entered the no man's land between the Nueces and Rio Grande rivers, drawing Mexican fire. The expected war had begun.

There were two distinct phases to the war in California. The first consisted of the almost uncontested seizure of the province by American forces. Reports of Taylor's activities in Texas reached Commodore John D. Sloat, who commanded the Pacific squadron at Mazatlán, in June 1846. Since Sloat's instructions were to occupy California upon a declaration of war between the United States and Mexico and he was fearful of British designs,



he rushed north to Monterey Bay. But Sloat did not occupy the town, since he lacked evidence of an actual declaration of war. His hand was forced when he learned of the successes of the Bear Flaggers and that Frémont had joined them. On July 7, 1846, he raised the American flag at Monterey and issued a proclamation stating that "henceforth California will be a portion of the United States." It was a conciliatory document, promising Californians U.S. citizenship, religious freedom, and freer trade. Two days later, the American flag was raised at Sonoma, Sutter's Fort, and San Francisco.

Aged and ill, Sloat turned his command over to a much more aggressive commander, Commodore Robert F. Stockton. A prominent easterner, Stockton was flamboyant, adventurous, and ambitious. On questionable authority, he promoted Frémont to the rank of major, and later to lieutenant colonel. Stockton also enlisted the California Battalion as horse marines and sailed off with them for Los Angeles—to the discomfort of most of Frémont's seaisick mountain men. On July 28 Frémont and his men landed at San Diego, while Stockton landed at San Pedro with a force of marines and sailors. Marching north, Frémont joined Stockton and on August 13 they occupied Los Angeles, as Pío Pico and José Castro fled to Mexico. In Los Angeles, Stockton issued offensive statements against California authorities and unnecessarily imposed martial law and a strict curfew. Leaving Captain Archibald Gillespie and 50 men as a garrison, Stockton and Frémont returned north.

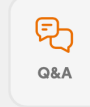
Where courteous and diplomatic actions might have been called for, Gillespie chose to enforce Stockton's martial law and curfew harshly and rigorously. Led by José María Flores, the Angelenos rebelled, attacked Gillespie, and, after a short siege, forced his surrender on September 29. Meanwhile, warned of Gillespie's plight, Stockton recruited a force to sail to San Diego, while Frémont marched south with the 300-man California Battalion. At the same time, General Stephen W. Kearny was approaching from the east.

General Kearny had been sent to the southwest to obtain control of lands that President Polk hoped to acquire from Mexico. He took possession of New Mexico at Santa Fe without encountering any opposition and proceeded west to California with some 300 men. When he met Kit Carson returning east with the report that California had been occupied without resistance, Kearny sent most of his force back to Santa Fe and persuaded Carson to guide his remaining troops to the West Coast. In early December, Kearny reached San Pascual, an Indian village east of San Diego, his men and animals showing the effects of

the long 2,000-mile march. Confronted by a large force of Californians under Andrés Pico (Pío Pico's brother), Kearny sent his exhausted men on a charge that strung the company out widely. The Californians, riding superior horses and armed with long lances, struck the disunited Americans. Sixteen or 18 Americans were killed, and an equal number, including Kearny, were wounded seriously. Pico's men came away virtually unscathed and proceeded to pin Kearny down in a desert siege. At this point, Carson and Lieutenant Edward F. Beale slipped through the lines to San Diego, where Stockton organized a relief force. With this aid, Kearny finally reached San Diego on December 12.

Re-conquest of the south, the second phase of the war in California, soon followed. It took Kearny and Stockton another month to march north to Los Angeles, which was recaptured on January 10, 1847. Flores, leaving Andrés Pico in command of the Californians, fled to Sonora. Reluctant to surrender to the harsh Stockton, Pico rode north to capitulate to Frémont at San Fernando. Learning that Frémont had already pardoned a relative, Jesús Pico, for violating his parole in the rebellion, Andrés correctly gambled on similar treatment. On January 13 the two men agreed to the Cahuenga Capitulation, ending the revolt without rancor.

With California at last securely in the hands of the United States, Commodore Stockton, again on questionable authority, appointed Frémont governor and sailed off for Mexican waters. In spite of the presence of Kearny, a brigadier general who had been sent west with specific orders to organize a government in the conquered province, Frémont issued orders establishing his government in Los Angeles. When Kearny attempted to exert his authority, Frémont, a mere lieutenant in the army a few months previously, infuriated him by arrogantly refusing to comply, asserting that his orders from Stockton came from a superior command. After dispatches from Washington confirmed Kearny's position, Frémont was forced to return to the East with Kearny under arrest, and was court-martialed. Though defended by his powerful father-in-law, Senator Benton, Frémont was convicted of mutiny, disobedience, and conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline, but he was recommended for clemency. President Polk confirmed his guilt on only the second two counts, granted clemency, and ordered him back to duty. Frémont, however, resigned his commission rather than admit the justice of the decision; the court-martial, oddly enough, only enhanced his attractiveness as a political figure. Meanwhile, Kearny had left the able Colonel Richard B. Mason behind as military governor.



The war with Mexico left little other imprint on California and finally ended when the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed on February 2, 1848, and ratified by the U.S. Senate on March 11. By its terms, as had been expected, California was ceded to the United States. The “ripe pear” had been plucked.

Culture in Spanish and Mexican California

California’s isolation and its relatively primitive existence made it a cultural desert. Indeed, officials appointed to serve in California found it difficult to persuade their womenfolk to follow them into what was perceived as a social wasteland. The difficulty of life in provincial California is reflected in the exceedingly limited and short-lived attempts at education and in the near absence of arts and letters, although the more affluent *rancheros* imported some fine furniture, clothing and a few *objets d’art*. Perhaps the most significant cultural contribution of the period was the development of the architecture of the missions, ranchos, and Monterey-style homes.

Education was badly neglected, both inside and outside the missions. Mission schooling was limited to musical training and development of industrial arts. As many as 50 elementary schools existed at various times outside the missions, but none lasted any reasonable length of time. Some Spanish governors, notably Diego de Borica and Pablo Vicente de Solá, set up schools in old granaries or barracks, with retired soldiers who could read and write and do simple arithmetic serving as teachers. Using disciplinary methods such as a small cat-o-nine tails, they stifled student interest as effectively as they imparted learning, as Mariano G. Vallejo vividly recalled. As late as 1845, scarcely 100 Native Californians were able to read and write.

A lucky few youngsters were given personal instruction by priests, military officers, and foreigners. As youths, Juan B. Alvarado, José Castro, and Mariano G. Vallejo were taken under the wing of Governor Solá, who taught them from his personal library, and, of course, his protégés became important figures in Mexican California. Near Monterey, with the financial assistance of Governor Figueroa, William P. Hartnell conducted classes for his own and neighbor children.



Petaluma Adobe

The double veranda of the restored main building at Mariano Vallejo’s Petaluma Rancho (circa 1840)—the largest non-ecclesiastical adobe building in Hispanic California—attests to the influence of the new Monterey style. Photograph by Richard J. Orsi.

Q&A



His Colegio de San José closed soon after Figueroa's death. The most favored were the boys whose families could afford to send them to Hawaii, Chile, or even Europe for their education. Girls were much less likely to receive any formal schooling other than training in cooking, sewing, and household management.

Given its low levels of literacy, it is not surprising that Mexican California produced little in the way of an indigenous literature. However, the writings of Francisco Palóu—including *Noticias de la Nueva California*, the first book written in California, and *Vida de Junipero Serra*—are basic works on the early history of Spanish California. With no printing press available before the 1830s, the region is distinguished more by the descriptive writings of foreign residents and visitors than by its native works. The most famous of these is Richard Henry Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast*, but many argue that Alfred Robinson's *Life in California* is superior. The mountain men also contributed to this literature, notably James Ohio Pattie's *Personal Narrative*. John C. Frémont's reports on his expeditions were also widely read. Jedediah Smith's account of his pioneering 1826 expedition to California was undiscovered until 1977.

The most pervasive cultural influence of Spanish and Mexican California has been its architecture. The "Mission" style became popular at the turn of the twentieth century. Early missions were essentially mud huts with thatched roofs, but as Indian neophytes acquired construction skills, mission fathers replaced them with adobe and stone buildings. Reflecting Roman-Moorish influences, California mission style sprouted archways, long colonnades, and thick walls and tile roofs (lessons taught by earthquake and fire). With few architectural adornments, the lines of Mission style were simple and clean. The Spanish and Mexican periods also saw the evolution of the now-ubiquitous "ranch" style house. Square or oblong, made mostly of thick adobe walls, with spacious rooms and long covered porches, rancho houses proved to be comfortably cool in summer heat but warm in the winter. A fusion of the California rancho house with New England architecture later became known as the "Monterey" style, introduced by Thomas O. Larkin for his home and customs house. The wide upper-story balcony, adobe construction, and white woodwork typical of this style can be seen in the restored buildings of modern Monterey.

