



Miners moved frequently, sometimes every few days. Moving this tent was pretty easy, but even when frame construction became popular, it wasn't uncommon to either pick up the frame shack or disassemble it by sections to move on to the next mining camp.

Chapter 1: El Dorado County — Coloma, Placerville, Georgetown, Cool, Fairplay & vicinity

El Dorado county was one of the most prosperous of the mining counties. It is estimated that the vast product of the gold-fields of California at least \$100,000,000 was taken out here. Scattered all over the Union are hundreds of men, now rolling in wealth, who made their "stake" in the placers of El Dorado county. The industrious thousands who once swarmed in these canyons, digging for the precious metal, have vanished, leaving ravished stream-beds and abandoned camps, as the only monuments of their presence.

There were no distinctions in society; dress did not indicate wealth or poverty. The most filthy and ragged looking "ombre" might have the biggest pile.

Luther Melanchthon Schaeffer, 1851





The roads were so wretched that supplies could be got to the mines only by pack-animals. A dollar per pound was the customary rate to Coloma and to Hangtown, which were about the same distance from Sacramento.

Gold dust was the universal currency, and the “blower” and the scales were a fixture in every place of business. The weights were often home-made, and of very dubious specific gravity.

David Leeper, 1849



Steve Crandell Collection

Coloma was a bustling town when this photograph was taken in 1857. Even though many miners were located outside the actual town, it was still a hub of commerce for the thousands of miners in surrounding areas. Note the covered bridge in the background. It was one of several in the area.

OLD COLOMA! The town with some history--no, the starting point of a history of El Dorado county, and of the total revolution in the history of the whole State, throwing her out of the lethargy and quietness of hundreds of years in a feverish excitement that kept her enchained for about twenty-five years. The discovery of gold in the race of the Coloma mill, however, did not stop with the revolutionizing of California; no, it became epidemic and infected the whole civilized world. The alarm was given out, and Coloma became the motto of the day, Coloma the longing of millions, and Coloma the endpoint of the travel of thousands, whose starting points had been most every where on this globe. And right here it may be allowed to put the question: Has California been benefited with the discovery of gold at Coloma, and all the circumstances that followed? The discovery of gold was unavoidable, it would have been made sooner or later. But there can be no doubt that California would be better off nowadays, if the discovery had not been made before the State became more settled and thicker populated, or if the discovery would have been kept a secret as Capt. Sutter had proposed it. A slow development would have avoided the outgrowing of all those monopolies under which the State is suffering now. What did those miners of early days care for the

welfare of this country? More than nine out of each ten came here to make their pile and march home with it.

Coloma is located on the South Fork of the American river, in an altitude of 900 feet above the level of the sea, on the upper end of the Coloma basin, which is surrounded by hills from 800 to 1,000 feet higher up.

For the first few years after the discovery of gold all the new arrivals were bound for Coloma, and though the mines in the vicinity were rich and plenty of them, the population was growing so fast that soon many had to be turned away to look out for other diggings. But a large business was done here in support of a population that numbered into the thousands. The first business places in town were Capt. Shannon & Cady's, the New York Store, S. S. Brook's store, and John Little's emporium on the North side of the river. Warner, Sherman & Bestor, of the United States army, kept a store here during the winter of 1848-'49. The first hotel was the Winters Hotel, Messrs. Winters & Cromwell, proprietors; A. J. Bayley, now of Pilot Hill, attended bar there. Sutter's saw-mill had been finished and was put to work by Messrs. Winters, Marshall & Bayley, doing a fine business. A large two-story building had been erected for a theater in 1852. Capt. Shannon was Alcalde of the township, and John T. Little first Postmaster, a Post office having been established already in 1849. This then was the principal Post office in California.

Placer mining near Coloma. Note the various styles of hats. Clearly there are two Chinese in this group, but the styles of other hats indicates this was truly a multinational group working together on this claim in 1851.



El Dorado County Historical Society

Mr. Sinclair, who had two hundred acres of fine ripe wheat, left it and took the Indians who were to have harvested it to the mines; the gold he found could be measured by the bushel, I was told.



Heinrich Lienhard, 1849