



Gold Rush Student Activity

Gold Rush Jobs

Not everyone was a miner during the California Gold Rush.

The discovery of gold at Sutter’s Mill in 1848 prompted the migration of approximately 300,000 people to California during the Gold Rush. While many were hopeful miners, some of Placer County’s most well-known pioneers created businesses to sell products or provide services to miners.

Mining was difficult and dangerous, and not always profitable. Other professions could promise more money, and they helped create Placer County as we know it today.



Learn about these professions below.

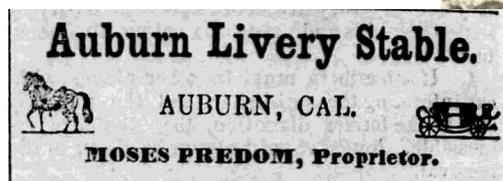
Barbershop: Not all professions required hard manual labor. Barbers and bathhouses were popular amongst miners, who came to town for supplies, business, entertainment, and a good bath.

Richard Rapier was born free in the slave state of Alabama in 1831. He attended school before moving to California in 1849. He mined and farmed before he purchased a building on East Street and opened a barbershop. He built up a loyal clientele and expanded to include a bathhouse.



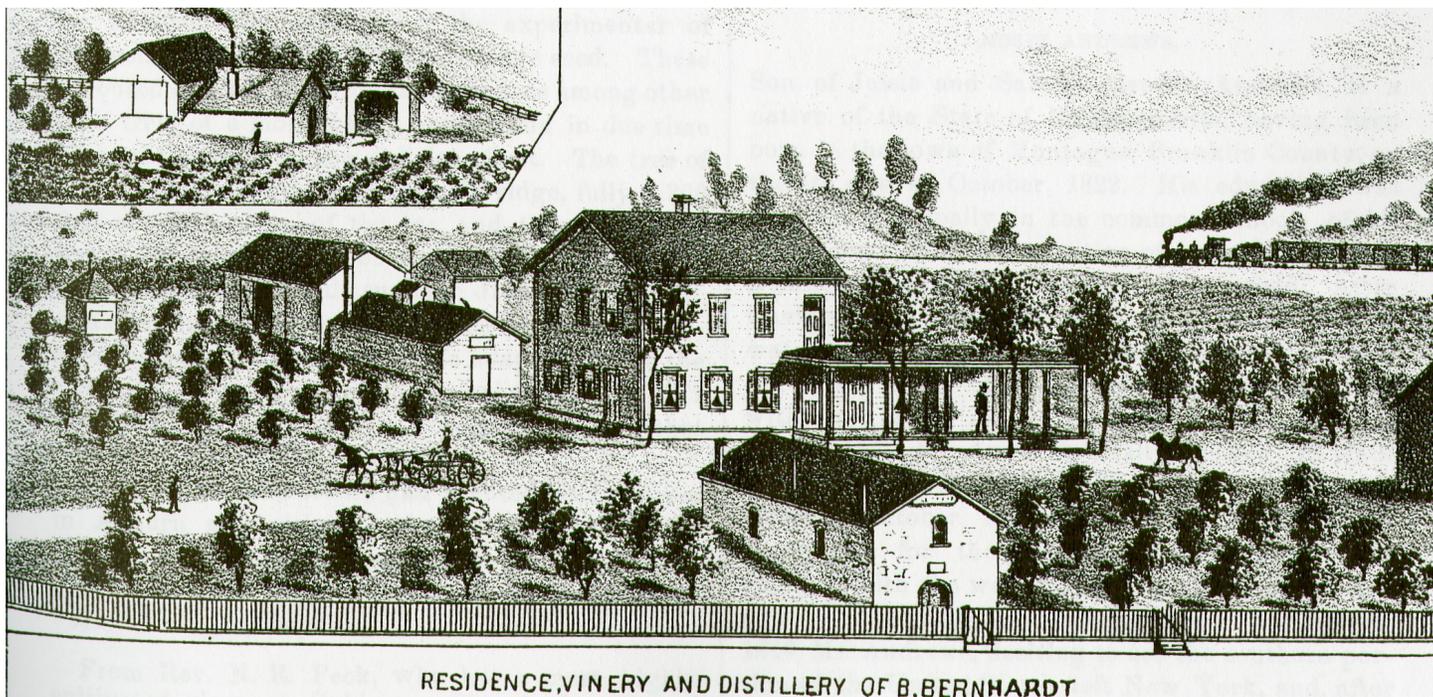
Blacksmith: Blacksmiths were essential to the Gold Rush. Their ability to shape and repair metal goods provided a steady stream of work. Blacksmiths repaired mining tools, mended wagons, and made other goods.

Moses Prudhomme was a Canadian who came around Cape Horn to California in 1857. He tried mining but returned to his previous trade – blacksmithing. He had a blacksmith shop in Auburn.



Farming: Placer County's temperate climate is good for growing a variety of produce. Pre-existing mining ditches were easily repurposed into irrigation systems, and the Transcontinental Railroad helped ship produce across the nation.

Bernhard Bernhard was a German immigrant who came to California via the Isthmus of Panama to find gold. He later became a teamster to haul supplies, and then bought a farm, which he worked with his family.



Lodging: Placer County had many hotels to serve travelers and miners during the Gold Rush. Many boardinghouses were run by women during the Gold Rush. The California constitution allowed women to retain their own property, separate from their husband, which was unique at the time. The 1852 Sole Trader Act also allowed women to own and operate a business independently from her husband.

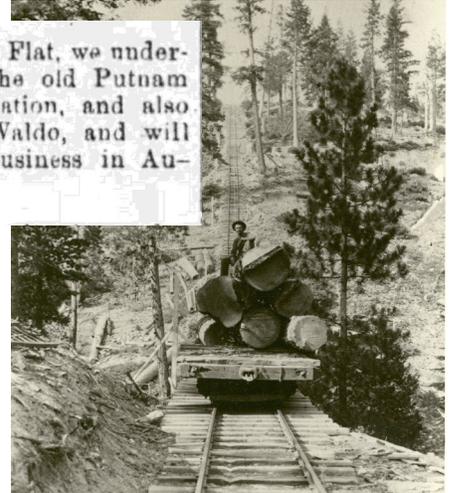
Elizabeth Keller Kittler was a German immigrant who moved to California with her husband in 1854. After he died, Kittler was left to raise their six children alone. She bought the Empire Hotel in Auburn in 1874.



Lumber: The explosive growth of towns around Placer County required massive amounts of building. Wood was the primary building material used during the Gold Rush.

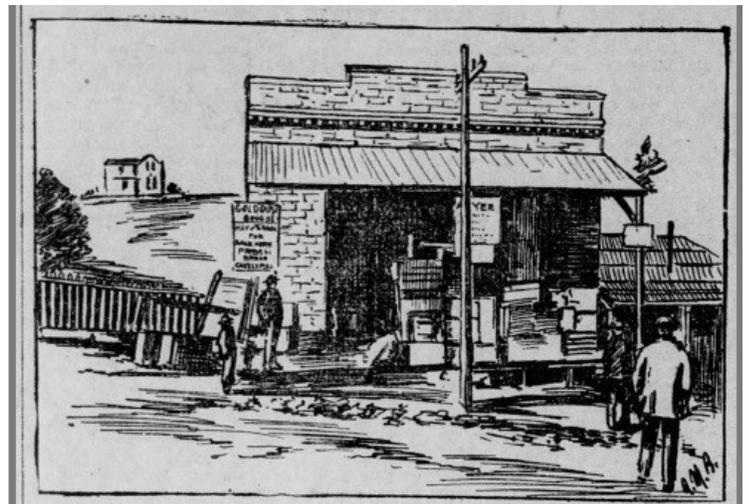
George Washington Towle was born in Vermont and came to California via the Isthmus of Panama in 1857. After mining for three years, he started a successful logging business with his three brothers.

Towle Brothers, of Dutch Flat, we understand, have bought out the old Putnam lumber yard at Auburn Station, and also the lumber yard of A. S. Waldo, and will hereafter run the lumber business in Auburn.



Merchants: People needed supplies, and some merchants made a fortune charging exorbitant fees for goods. A general store in the Gold Rush could sell mining tools, food, clothing, medicines, and other supplies.

Ah Yee came to California from China to mine for gold. He opened a store on Sacramento Street to sell supplies, food, and Chinese goods. He was a member of Sze Yap organization, which helped Chinese immigrants, and was well-known in the community.



Water: Water was essential to mining. People formed water companies to divert water from rivers through ditches, canals, and flumes, into mining operations. These companies charged miners for the water they used.

Elisha Lafayette Bradley was born in New York and came across the plains to Dutch Flat in 1850. He wanted to get rich mining, but it was hard work, and instead he formed the Dutch Flat Water Company to sell water to miners.

Dutch Flat Water Co.—Taking water from north fork of North Fork of American river, and supplying Dutch Flat. Gardner & Co., proprietors. Length 15 miles. Inches of water 200. Assessed value,

Imagine you have come to California for the Gold Rush and are now looking for a job.

What would you choose to do? Look at the jobs on the previous pages and make a decision. Think about what you would have to do in this job, and what resources would be required. What would be good, and what would be hard?

Job:

What do you have to do in this job?

What resources (tools, animals, etc.) does this work require?

Why would you choose this job?

