

★ March 10, 2020

The History of Sacramento

The discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill in Coloma launched the greatest human migration in history. Thousands of hopeful pioneers headed toward Mexican California on the Oregon Trail in search of a better life. From the settlement town of Old Sacramento to the supply center and trade post of Sutter's Fort, the Sacramento region is rich in Gold Rush History.

Old Sacramento Waterfront

As you enter the 28-acre [Old Sacramento State Historic Park](#), originally constructed in the 1850s, you'll step back to the California Gold Rush era. Pioneers first settled along the banks of the Sacramento River, a main traffic route for supplies. Regular flooding and subsequent disease made the early years difficult and implored the settlers to take on the ambitious task of raising the street level 12 feet. Today, after strong preservation efforts, the nostalgic appeal of early American history is reflected perfectly by the wooden sidewalks, horse-drawn carriages, old-fashioned candy shops and a Mississippi-style riverboat. History comes to life through interactive experiences, such as taking a ride on a steam engine train, seeing what a one-room schoolhouse looked like, or dressing in period costumes for an old-fashioned photo.

Considering the adventurous and ambitious spirit inherent of the pioneers, it is no surprise that some famous names got their start in Sacramento. For example, the influence of the "Big Four" of western railroading (Leland Stanford, Mark Hopkins, Collis P. Huntington and Charles Crocker) is evident throughout the city. [The Big Four Building in Old Sacramento](#) includes the Huntington Hopkins Hardware Store Museum and Stanford Gallery. B.F. Hastings opened as a bank in April 1853 and is now a museum housing a reconstructed Supreme Court and the Wells Fargo Museum.

Adventurous ambition was truly crystallized by the riders for the Pony Express. A monument stands in Old Sacramento honoring the daredevil orphans who conquered the challenging trip from St. Joseph, Missouri to the Western Terminus in Sacramento. Five hundred horses, 200 relay stations, 80 riders, and 10 days was the standard for the legendary, albeit short-lived, Pony Express.

Old Sacramento is also home to the [California State Railroad Museum \(CSRM\)](#). The museum is the most comprehensive collection of trains and other related artifacts in North America, with incredibly knowledgeable docents eager to share railroad history. Visitors walk through this remarkable chapter in history, from the grueling task of laying tracks to boarding the deluxe cars that graced the Western United States. The [Sacramento History Museum](#) offers yet another opportunity to learn about early Sacramento history with exhibits on the Gold Rush, newspaper business and agriculture industries. Younger visitors to the museum can also try their hand at panning for gold.

Old Sacramento Underground Tours

Hidden beneath the city for nearly 150 years, Old Sacramento's underground has long been the capital's best-kept secret. Today, you can join thousands of residents and visitors in uncovering the facts behind the legends that lie below our buildings and sidewalks. Explore excavated foundations and enclosed pathways while your tour guide recounts the tales of the devastation, perseverance, and determination that led to California's only successful street-raising project. Old Sacramento also offers 'adult' evening underground tours that explore the city's racier past secrets, Gold Rush experience tours and ghost tours in October. www.historicoldsac.org

City of Sacramento

Long before the development of Old Sacramento, Native Americans populated the area. The Nisenan lived in the Sacramento valley for 10,000 years before any other settlers arrived. By 1833, however, a smallpox epidemic killed 20,000 Nisenan in the valley leaving the population vulnerable. And so, Sacramento's modern history actually begins in 1839 when Johann Augustus Sutter landed on the banks of the Sacramento River. He received a 48,000-acre land grant from Mexican Governor Alvarado and built the adobe trading post known as [Sutter's Fort](#). The fort was Sacramento's earliest settlement and served many purposes. Sutter would trade with Indians, raise livestock and act as a representative of the Mexican government. When James Marshall discovered gold at Sutter's Mill, Sutter's Fort became invaluable to pioneers. Tour the State Historic Park for a glimpse into Gold Rush life at the fort, including exhibit rooms of copper and blacksmith's shops, a bakery, prison, dining room and living quarters.

Moving through history, the [Historic City Cemetery](#) was established in 1849, and is the last resting place for over 20,000 early Sacramentans including John A. Sutter Jr., Edwin and Margaret Crocker, and Mark Hopkins. The cemetery is now on the National Register of Historic Places. Guided and self-guided tours are available.

[St. Paul's Episcopal Church](#) is home to Sacramento's oldest congregation, with Tiffany stained glass windows and a rare Johnson Tracker organ and the [Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament](#) features a 217-foot tower built in 1889. Its prominent architectural design echoes of 19th century Paris with stained glass from Austria.