

## After the Gold Rush

The days of the lone miner striking it rich did not last long. In the 1850s big mining companies moved in and began washing away whole hillsides in their search for gold. Many people who had come to the Gold Rush from the eastern United States returned there to family and friends and familiar ways of life. But immigrants, former slaves, and Indians, could not or would not go back. They stayed in California and shifted from mining to other ways of making a living.

Some families built farms in the gold country. The Estes family came to California from Missouri in 1851. Howard Estes, while still a slave, had been sent to mine gold in 1849. He was allowed to keep some of his diggings, and was able to buy freedom for himself, his wife Hannah, and his children Sylvia and Jackson. Many years later Sylvia's daughter wrote down her mother's stories of life in early California. From these notes, historians have been able to draw a picture of Sylvia's life.

The Estes family had a small farm. They grew grain which was ground into flour at a mill. They also grew fruit and vegetables. During good years they had enough fruit and vegetables to give away. Sylvia took care of the chickens and collected eggs. The Estes kept cows as well, and sold butter in Placerville.

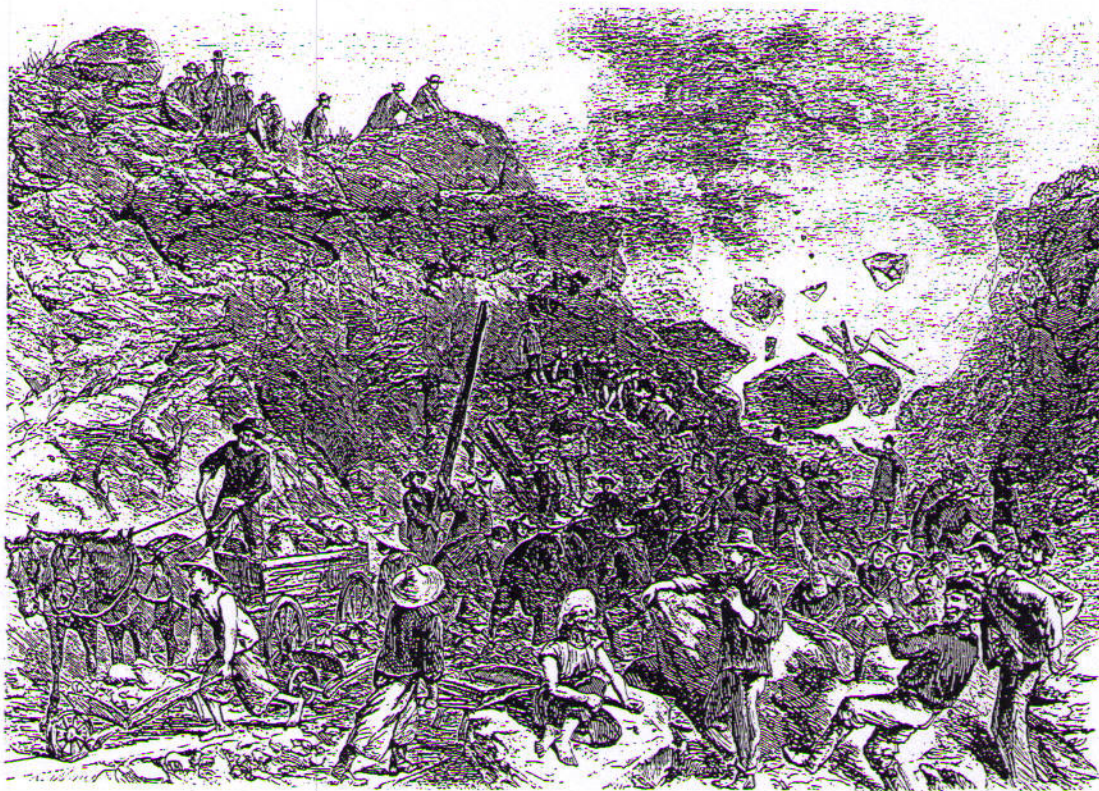
Howard Estes worked in a gold mine. Sylvia and Jackson panned for gold in rivers near old mines. They sold gold dust and earned about a dollar a day.

Hannah Estes took in washing. She charged \$3.00 to wash and iron a pleated skirt and \$5.00 for a frilled dress. Sylvia helped her mother with the washing. ..

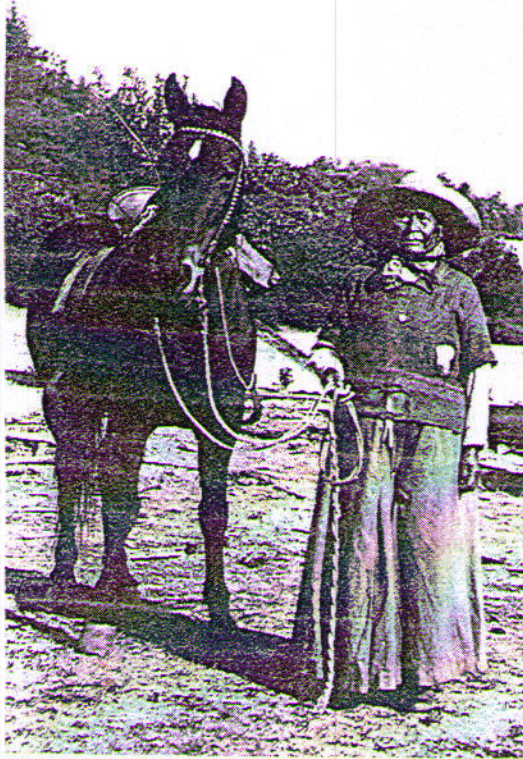
About 68,000 Chinese people came to California during the peak of the Gold Rush in the 1850s—about one-fourth of the total mining population. They worked hard, either for themselves or for mining companies. Unfortunately, prejudice drove them from the mines. About half returned to China. Many of those who stayed went to work in community businesses, on ranches and farms, and as fishermen. Others worked for low wages building roads.

When railroad construction began in the 1860s, Chinese workers were quickly hired. They were given the most dangerous job—placing dynamite in cliffs to blast through mountains. Chinese-American writer Maxine Hong Kingston describes this work through the story of Ah Goong in her novel *China Men*.

They climbed above the site for tunnel or bridge and lowered one another down in wicker baskets made stronger by the lucky words they had painted on four sides. Ah Goong got to be a basketman because he was thin and light. Some basketmen were fifteen-year-old boys. He rode the basket barefoot, so his boots, the kind to stomp snakes with, would not break through the bottom. The basket swung and twirled, and he saw the world sweep underneath him... Swinging near the cliff, Ah Goong stood up and grabbed it by a twig. He dug holes, then inserted gunpowder and fuses.. He worked neither too fast nor too slow, keeping even with the others. The basketmen signaled one another to light the fuses. He struck match after match and dropped the burnt matches over the sides. At last his fuse caught; he waved, and the men above pulled hand over hand hauling him up, pulleys creaking.... "Hurry, hurry," he said. Some impatient men clambered up their ropes. Ah Goong ran up the ledge road they'd cleared and watched the explosions.... This time two men were blown up.



Chinese workers help to blast away a hillside for the railroad.



Lucy Young in about 1936

Indians were among the first to mine gold in California. By the end of 1848, it was estimated that 4,000 Indians were mining gold, along with 2,000 whites. Many worked for mining companies, but some staked their own claims. With their gold, Indians bought goods like tools, blankets, and food from white traders. But relations between Indians and whites were often strained. Some white traders charged higher prices to Indians, and many white miners thought they had the right to take Indian land. Life would never be the same for California's Indians after the Gold Rush.

Lucy Young, a member of the Lassik tribe, was born about 1846 and had a peaceful childhood. But in 1862, troops took over the tribe's land and killed many of the men. Lucy and her mother escaped. When she was 90 years old, Lucy told the story of her life to a friend, who wrote it down. Here Lucy recalls her grandfather's prediction.

My grandpa, before white people came, had a dream. . . . My grandpa say "White Rabbit"—he mean white people—"gonta [going to] devour our grass, our seed, our living. We won't have nothing more, this world. Big elk with straight horn come when white man bring it." I think he meant cattle. "Nother animal, bigger than deer, but round feet, got hair on neck." This one, horse, I guess.

My aunt say: "Oh, Father, you out your head, Don't say that way."

He say, "Now Daughter, I not crazy. You young people gonta see this."