



California State Parks

Video Transcript



The Historic Town of Coloma at Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park

NARRATOR: Welcome to Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park. Most people think of this park as the site where, in 1848, James Marshall made the historic discovery that touched off the great California Gold Rush. But the park has much more to offer visitors than this claim to fame—it also tells the story of how the town of Coloma grew and prospered.

Today we'll be taking you on a tour of the historic buildings of Coloma and you will see demonstrations of the skills and crafts associated with life in the 19th century—including gold panning, blacksmithing, rope making, weaving, and washing clothes. So please relax and enjoy this special tour of the historic town of Coloma.

Panning for Gold

All right, my name is Rod Blan. I'm a resident gold panner here at Bekeart's Gunsmith Shop here at Marshall Gold Discovery State Park. All we're going to be doing here is separating two weights, the light stuff from the heavy stuff, and we're going to be using the water to wash the dirt away from all the rocks. Pretty simple, huh? Okay, and then on the other hand, it's nothing but a lot of hard work and luck. We dig as deep as we can. Hopefully we'll find some gold in there, huh?

Gold panning is a process used to extract the small nuggets, the flakes, and the gold dust. The big ones are easy, if you found one of those. A piece of gold that big, you just put it in your pocket. This is a process used to extract small nuggets, the flakes, and the gold dust. Start right here in the water—shake it, stir, jiggle it. That makes any gold go to the bottom. As I continue jiggling it, makes all these rocks come to the top. Now if there's any gold in there that big, it wouldn't be on top, would it? No, and you can see it's not gold. I rake those right off the top, right off the top of the sand. I shake them up again without dumping them out—made all these rocks come to the top. If there was any gold in there that big, it wouldn't be on top. All we're doing is washing and watching, huh? I put my hand back in there, pick up some rocks and wash them. If they're not gold, I throw them away. All I do is wash the dirt away from all the rocks, so we can see what they are. Shake up some more little ones.

Okay, at this point all I did was wash the dirt away from the big rocks and most of the little rocks. I'm down to sand. Now, I shook the sand down to one end. I'm going to pour the water off. As the water pours off, establish that angle, I hold that angle. There's some gold right there. You're watching everywhere. There's a piece out there. There's a piece over there.

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Wash these rocks—those aren't gold. Get them out of here. Shake it back four or five jiggles, keeps that weight on the bottom, a light jiggle until it comes up. Scoop the water straight forward, pull straight back—easy. You're just watching. There's gold here, there's gold out there. The only way that gold is going to come out of there is if you dump it out or if you wash it out or shake it back to the bottom where it's safe. Same time we jiggle, the light material comes to the top. We're washing that light material right off the top, just like the waves at the beach. Shake it back four or five jiggles. It keeps the weight on the bottom, all the light material comes to the top. When we pull back, smooth and easy, that water washes a thin layer right off the top. The black sand in there is magnetite. That's natural iron. They make steel out of it. It's heavy, that's why it's on the bottom. We're going to see gold because it's heavy, we just shook it to the bottom.

What did the miners say when they discovered gold?

VISITOR: Eureka!

BLAN: What's that mean? I found it! We're going to have to get rid of all the dirt to see if it's in there. Give it a little swirl, a little jiggle. Eureka, huh? Clean it up a little bit more—look how heavy it is—straight forward and straight back. Now a miner had to find that much or twice that much just to get by everyday. Pretty nice, huh? We're going to the bank. Keep it in the pan, nice and smooth. That's pretty good. You can be my partner anytime there buddy. Eureka!

Marshall's Cabin

Hi, I'm Doc Hutchins. I'd like to welcome you to Marshall's cabin. This is the second cabin that occupied this site. The first cabin was built in 1857, but after a fire in 1862 James Marshall had to rebuild it. Come on in. Let's take a look around.

Welcome to our living room here. This is where we would sit and have dinner. Of course we've got some tools laid out here. James is a carpenter, and I kind of help him out around here. He's also got just a few basic tools. We've got a scythe. We grow grapes and stuff around here for brandy and things. We've got some wood-working tools, the basic augers and bits and this is a froe. This comes in real handy for making new shingles for the roof. We have some homemade furniture here, like I said Marshall and myself are carpenters, so we make everything that we have. He's out prospecting right now and he left me this pan here—it's got a hole in the bottom. We have all of our woodworking tools here and we have just the basics.

We have our dishes and stuff here, and back in here we've got our kitchen and our woodstove. This is where we cook dinners. We've got our dutch oven, our little wood-burning stove here. It's not much, but it's home. It's real simple—you make your fire down in here and then you've got your burners up top and just put your frying pan up there or your dutch oven and cook, heat water for coffee. We've got a washtub over here for washing our dishes in our hot water. Like I said, it's not much, but it's home.

Now when we're out prospecting, sometimes we come across a lot of quartz. In order to get the gold out of that quartz, we've got to break it up and for that we have this mortar and pestle.

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Now normally we have this set up outside because this will hang from a bent-over sapling and it'll hold it up in the air. We throw our quartz down in this iron kettle here called a mortar. This is a pestle. You simply pound that up and down, and this iron shoe actually crushes up the quartz. Once it gets to a real fine powder, we can take that material and put it in our gold pans. Then we can pan it out and see if we've got any gold.

This is Marshall's bedroom. This is where he sleeps when he's here. You know, he made the bed himself. It's all madrone. He doesn't have a store-bought mattress in here. He's got it stuffed full of straw and covered with some blankets. We don't have a whole lot of money. I see James left his walking stick there, he just loved a madrone walking stick. We used to have a woodstove sitting right over here where those bricks and that sand is setting, and that was because it gets real cold here in the wintertime and these walls are real thin. There's nothing here to keep the cold out.

The Noteware-Thomas House

This is the Noteware-Thomas House—so named for its first and last residents. The Noteware-Thomas house provides a glimpse into how a typical family might have lived in Coloma in the mid to late 1800s. The house consists of two bedrooms, a living room, dining room, and kitchen. Behind the house is an outhouse and a well.

The Noteware-Thomas House was built in 1857 for C. N. Noteware and his family. Noteware was the new county recorder for El Dorado County, and during his first year as recorder he counted 10,000 people living in the county.

In the later 1850s and in the 1860s the house was home to various families. J. C. Canfield lived here after the Notewares. And J. C. Trescott moved in in 1862. During the 1860s homemade soap was cooked outside in a large pot and people could smell it for miles.

In 1875 Mr. and Mrs. John Price bought the house for \$150. Mr. Price was the Coloma postmaster. He died in 1902, and the town asked his wife to replace him as postmaster. Sadly, she died just two weeks later. Their daughter, Cora, was the house's next resident. She married Fred Thomas in 1906. Cora gave music lessons in the house and lived here until her death in 1946. Fred Thomas died in 1958, and in 1960 the State bought the house from Fred's sister and began its restoration.

Today, the Noteware-Thomas House serves as a reminder of what everyday life was like in the historic town of Coloma, a window into a small slice of the past.

Blacksmith Shop

My name is Bob Worth. I've been a blacksmith here for about three years now. The shop that we're in was built in 1903. It was built by an African-American named Pearley Monroe. He operated this shop at about 1928 sometime. Blacksmithing was starting to cool down about then, so he went into ranching. I think in the early days in Coloma there was about, we think, about 15 blacksmith shops. So that was quite a bit of business in here. They made all the

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tools and equipment for the miners that were here at that time, and it was a pretty big business.

What I'm working on now is . . . blacksmiths make their own tools, so eventually this will be a pair of tongs. This is a regular big vice that we use for holding the stuff. If you want to work on it, you just clamp it in there like that and fasten it down, and you can pretty much do what you want if it's in there pretty solid. We use that to hold it when we're filing or brushing it off or aligning it up or bending something. If we wanted to bend it, we could heat it up and put it in there and then bend it also.

Now if you're not careful when you're heating your metal up, if you wait around too long, you'll end up with a big blob in there. See how yellow that is on the end? That's just about ready to melt.

Making Rope

We're now putting up the twine to make a six-strand rope—they make me do all the hard work. If you will put your thumb on both of them now, I'll cut one thumb off. You don't need two thumbs. All righty. Now this here cord, the way it's twisted has to be tied into a square knot or it will come undone. Any other kind of knot will come undone. In my sleep, I tie square knots. All righty, now I'll trade with you. Okay, now turn that counter-clockwise. Now for just a tiny bit—that's good right there, now stay there. That's good. Come this way now. That's good. Come this way. Now we're going to finish it off. And that's all there is to making a rope.

Spinning Wool

My name is Renee Tully, and I'm here at Marshall Gold Discovery Park. Right now what I'm doing here is spinning wool—wool from sheep. In those times, almost every woman, if she wasn't a pauper, would have a spinning wheel in her kitchen and would do the spinning. Children would do the spinning on a drop spindle, and they started doing that at a very young age. They had no TVs, so they were able to do that. The spinning of wool is very simple, provided you have enough practice. You do two bobbins like this, put it together, spin it together, and you have a yarn. With the yarn, you either knit or crochet a garment or socks, or you waited until the weaver came to town with a big loom, gave him your yarn, and then he would weave cloth for you so that you could make pants for your husband, shirts, clothing for your children, or curtains, if you were able to get cotton to weave it. In this area here, they were not able to grow cotton because it needs a warmer climate for growing.

Fleece from the animal is first scoured, which is washed in hot water, to get the oil and the dust out of it—washed maybe in two or three waters, in very hot water. Once it's rinsed and water comes out clear, then it's laid out to dry. Then it's carded so that we can spin it, so that all the fiber is laying in the same direction.

The Papini House

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I'm Joan Wolfenden, and I'm a docent here at Gold Discovery State Historic Park. I tell a little bit about the history of the Papini House. The Papinis lived here for a number of years. They built a larger home and then this was a rental. We found a picture of the lady that was renting the house, and her name is Annie Elgy. Her picture is right above the chair. This is Annie Elgy, and we were fortunate enough to find a picture. She's sitting right here in 1913.

There is a calendar that we could read, so we knew what the house should look like at that time, and we've had it furnished. We found pieces of the wallpaper, and that is now a reproduction of the original.

When Annie Elgy lived here, she was a widow lady, didn't have much money. But in those days, they used the barter system, which was trading for what you needed. She had a garden out here in back and did a lot of canning. So she would take her scraps from her garden, give to neighbors' pigs, and they would give her eggs in return. She would do canning, trade her canned goods. She would sew for people. This would be Annie Elgy's sewing room. This is her sewing machine and some of the threads and so forth that she would use. Her ironing board—and you can see that she's working on some of the things right now. It's also her bedroom, so it was a combination of a sewing room/bedroom.

As I mentioned earlier, Annie Elgy did quite a bit of canning. What she would do is she would take the water from the well and come in here. This is a dry sink, and she would use this for cleaning her vegetables and washing dishes and that type of thing. You'll notice some of the implements that they used then, we still use today—some of the things. The only thing that might be a little different is this is a rug-beater. You don't see this many times, and I tell the children instead of a vacuum cleaner we would take our rugs and put them on the line and beat them. This was a lot of children's work also.

Annie Elgy would also can on a stove like this and it would be their heat also. This stove is used for cooking and heating and also for boiling water for baths, because in those days they would bring in a tub. You would get your water from out there in the well, bring it in, heat it up, pour it in the tub, take your bath, and then you would have to pour it out again. This is a woodstove used for cooking and heating.

Now if you would like to wash clothes like the pioneers do, we have tubs out here and soap and we will find out what it is to wash clothes with a washboard. Now this is what the children like. They like doing the washing—and I've had mothers say that only if they would do this at home it'd be perfect—but what we do is we take the soap, get it on here and we scrub like this, rinse it off, rinse it in this one, and then we take it over there and hang it up. The children think this is very easy, but I keep telling them what if they had to do this all the time with the sheets and all their clothing? Even the boys think it's great. This is also a new experience for some of the children. They're so used to dryers that they have never hung up clothes before.

The Schoolhouse

Well, good morning boys and girls. My name is Mrs. Hegarty, and I'm the schoolteacher here at the Coloma Schoolhouse. Before we go in, I'd like you to look around just a little bit. Over here is a pump. We didn't have running water in Coloma at the school in 1925, so they used

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this pump. There was a wonderful, deep water well, and they'd bring the water in each day for drinking and washing their hands and so forth. There used to be a school over here, but it burned down—I'll tell you a little bit more about that when we get in. But it was the courthouse and there's been a school on this property since about 1854.

What I'd like you to do is look around the classroom for about one minute and then raise your hand, tell me what you see that's different from your classroom. Look around and see how many things you can count that are different from your class. You're going to have to speak loudly because these high ceilings, sometimes it's hard to hear. All right, tell me one thing. The stove, the big wood stove. They didn't have a big central heater in here, so that stove they used in the winter. It was wonderful. There was a big wood shed out in back. They would bring the wood in and have the fire going, and it works very well.

Something else different? The piano. How many of you have a piano in your classroom? Music was very important, and so the teacher and many of the students played the piano. They had a music period.

Something else? Yes? The desks are different. Are your desks in a circle? Or you can move your desks, can't you? And tables. All right, the desks are different. Something else? While we're talking about the desks, who can tell me what the hole on the top of the desk might be used for? Who has an idea? Yes. The inkwell. That's right. The teacher would go around and fill the inkwell. The seats over there don't have them because those were for the 1st graders.

This was a one-room school from 1st through 8th grade. And in 1925 there were only nine children—two boys and seven girls. So it varied with the years, but there were never more than about 15 to 18 children at any one time in the school. Once they finished 8th grade, they graduated, and many of them, that was as much education as they had.

Who can see one other thing different from your school? Let's see, yes? The chalkboards. You have white boards with black—yes. And the chalkboards are made of something called slate. Who knows what slate is? Do you know what slate is? What is it? No? Slate is a kind of a rock, and there were several slate mines around Coloma and Placerville. That's where this school came from.

In 1919 the old school burned down next door that had been the courthouse—that was in September. There were no children in school because it was a Friday afternoon. The next Monday they started school right across the street at the Oddfellows Building and went to school there until January. The people of the town wanted to build or find another school, and this very school was empty up at Slatington, which is by Kelsey. It had been built for the slate miners' children. The slate mine had closed, and it was a wonderful empty school. Actually, at that time it had a slate roof as well. So they brought it down in a wagon train piece by piece and rebuilt it here. It served as a school until the late 1950s.

Who could turn on the lights for us? It's a little dark in here. Would you turn on the light? Where is it? In 1925 they didn't have any electricity here in Coloma, so why do you think they have the big tall windows? Right, to let more light in. And if you'll look at the glass, it's kind of dirty now, but the glass is very wavy as well. It's wonderful old glass. That's why they had

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these tall windows—to catch all the light, because in the winter, on a dark, gloomy day, it would get pretty dark in here.

Also, I don't know if you can see in back, is the old phonograph. I don't know if any of you have had those before in your home as antiques, but they would crank the handle and have records of opera and marches and so forth. So it was another way to have music.

Look at the flag up at the top. Who can tell me how many stars were on the flag in 1925? Yes? No, guess again. No, more than that—one more. Anyone? Yes. No, more than that. In 1925 there were 48 states, 48 stars. Every morning the children did their Pledge of Allegiance. Who can tell me what the last two states after the 48 were? Yes? Alaska and Hawaii, good.

Look at the old school clock over there. It's a great clock. Who knows what is the name of that that makes it go back and forth? Yes. It's the pendulum—right. So as the pendulum goes back and forth, the clock advances, and it had to be wound once a week.

Since there was no running water, there were actually outhouses in back down by the river and that worked fine, too. The schedule for the children—the teacher rang the school bell. You were asking about the school bell. Here it is. The teacher rang the bell at 9 o'clock in the morning. Then the first children, the 1st graders, went home about 2 o'clock, so the teacher rang the bell again so the parents would know it was time to go home. And the older children, the 8th graders, stayed until 4 o'clock, which is a long day, isn't it? Except on Friday, and they got to go home at 3 o'clock.

Can anybody guess what this bench was for? Raise your hand. Oh, you're such a good class, good. Yes? That's what most people guess. No, it isn't for troublemakers. It was actually called the recitation bench. Can you say "recitation"? What does that mean, recitation? Like recite, huh? The teacher would have little groups, like the 1st graders or whatever, up here for reading, to do the numbers, and so forth. So they'd come up here and practice in small groups, you can imagine how small if they only had nine or ten children anyway. So they could use the flashcards—you probably have used flashcards. It could be eight take away two or eight plus two or two times eight. So, the same flashcards could be used for several different ages of children.

They also, each child, had a blackboard or a little slate board like this that they used so they could do compositions. They did a lot of writing. They had little workbooks and they used these. These, again, are slate so they could use chalk on the slate boards.

This building stopped being the school in about 1957. Then it was used for an antique store, a wonderful antique store I understand. After that, they closed the antique store, and the park took it over and restored it for one of the museums in the park. But just after it was restored, ready to open, a logging truck came down from Placerville, lost its huge load of logs, and these marks you see are from the logs that took out the two corners of this building. Nobody was hurt. It was on a Saturday, so nobody was hurt. But, it did big damage once again. So it took several more years to restore this the way it was in 1925. By the time it was closed, they did have running water and they had electricity, but they probably still used the woodstove for a long time because it works very well. Thank you for joining us here and I'm going to ask that

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you pass out. I'll ring the bell once more so you can hear it from outside.

NARRATOR: We hope you enjoyed this tour of Coloma and understand a little bit more about life in this lovely valley during and after the California Gold Rush. Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park is much more than the place where gold was discovered, it's also where a town was born and blossomed—a town whose remaining buildings now teach us about life in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Thank you for visiting us today, and we hope you'll come back again. There's always more to learn at Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park.

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