



California State Parks

Video Transcript



The Miner's Hat ***(Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park)***

NARRATOR, SPEAKING WITH A COUNTRY ACCENT: Hey boys, how ya doin'? How'd you do in our diggings today?

[Off camera a group of men mumble discouragingly]

Not too good? Hey, I did pretty good; I found me a crevice about three mile up river. Think I got pretty near an ounce out of there with my jack knife. One ounce, yeah, just enough to buy us a little bit of some fresh beans, maybe some more coffee.

Or, you know, I have an idea; I could treat myself to a new hat. What do you think, this one's seen better days, wouldn't you say? I've been wearing this hat a while. I could get me a hat over at Sam Brannan's store.

[Men grumble negatively]

Stay away, you're right; you know that fella Brannan wants the better part of this ounce for a new hat.

You know, them fellas that had this ground before we was here, before we claimed this, they left some hats behind. Yeah, they're in that trunk there, you remember? They took everything they had except them hats. I wonder if there's something in there that I could wear.

[Men mumble affirmatively]

You know though, a man has to be careful, you know what I'm saying, Jake? You can't just wear any old hat. A hat is what gives a man character, and presents his face to the world, and tells people what he is and what he stands for, and what people can expect. You can't just be wearing somebody else's hat; no telling what people might think. I'll see what's in here, though.

[Sound of trunk opening]

Here's what I'm talking about now, see? That hat there, they told me that hat was worn by Mr. Vallejo, back in the early days. Remember him? He had a big cattle rancho, back in the Mexican days. He used to ride around his rancho on a big caballo horse telling the vaqueros and Digger Indians what to do. He wore that hat like it was a prince's crown.

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NARRATOR ASSUMES THE CHARACTER OF MARIANO VALLEJO, SPEAKING WITH A SPANISH ACCENT: Ah, buenos tardes, señores. Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo a su servicio. You would please to pardon my poor Inglés; I seldom hear my native Español anymore. These Americanos, they cannot even pronounce my name, Vallejo.

And they do not know who I am; aunque I was a Commandante of California, a caballero, and a rancho. And I founded the town of Sonoma where I had my rancho; and Benicia, I named after my wife. You call me a Mexican, but I am not so; I am a Californio. When I was a niño, this California was a part of Mexico. But the Californios were never happy with that, and never happy with the Gobernadores that were sent up from Mexico City to be in charge of our affairs, because they were fools; they were corrupt, self-serving men. My nieto, Juan Bautista Alvarado, he overthrew the Mexican government, and he named me the Supreme Military Commandante of California.

We did not know what would happen, but we did know that more and more Americanos were coming into California all the time. In those days they were good men; they came into California by ship, into San Francisco, Monterey; they became Californios, too. They learned to speak Spanish, they became Católicos, most of them. They were friends of ours. I learned to speak English from them. We celebrated the Fourth of July with them, as they attended our fiestas.

California was a paradise in those days, amigos, a paradise! I believe, in the whole world there has never been such a happy place as that. We lived like princes. The ganados roamed the open range by the thousands, and the vaqueros would round them up two times, three times a year. Then most of the beef was left for the coyotes after the hides had been stripped. And the seeds and cuttings brought in by the old coloniales de España had multiplied into a cornucopia of plenty.

And our fiestas, such happy times they were. Our wedding fiestas would go on for days and days, with huge amounts of beef and bread and vino, and we would dance and dance, jarabe and jotas, with the Indians playing guitarras and violins. California was a paradise of beauty and abundance.

And about that time, Señor Juan Sutter came into California. Like the otros, he came in and became a Californio: he learned to speak Spanish, he called himself a citizen of Mexico, he called himself a Católico. But, unlike the otros, he did not want to be with us, he did not want to be a rancho in the valles down near the coast, in San Francisco or . . . No, he wanted to be all by himself in the Gran Valle de Sacramento. So there he built his fuerte, using the Indians to make the adobes. He soon had a huge rancho with thousands of ganado and caballos.

We Californios began to be very worried because the Americanos then began to come across the Sierra Nevada into Sutter's Fuerte, and they were not like those earlier ones: they had no respect for our language, for our religion, our way of life. They did not want blend in with our cultura, but to dominate it. As a Commandante, I asked to see their passports. They replied to me they did not have any, they did not need any, they said. And there was nothing we could do, there was so many more coming behind them. Still, I took the part of the Americanos when they overthrew the last Mexican government in '46.

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California is a special place, amigos, en cierto, to become wealthy and powerful in time. And I thought it the best thing for us to incorporate ourselves into the happiest and freest nation in the history of the world, and one soon to become the most powerful as well. And it was a proud day for me when California became a part of the United States of America.

But of course, we did not know what was going to happen. And when gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill, Señor Sutter wrote to me a letter about it. And I replied to him, "As the water flows through Sutter's millrace, may the gold flow into Sutter's purse." But Sutter and I, and all the Californios, could see what this would mean--we knew the Americanos would come in large numbers. But I don't think anyone could have foreseen how many would come, or how quickly the old pastoral life of the Californios would disappear.

But you know, there is an old saying in Español, "Quien llama el toro encuanta la cornada." This means, "He who calls the bull must suffer the wounds."

NARRATOR RESUMES ORIGINAL CHARACTER, SPEAKING WITH A COUNTRY ACCENT: You know, I'd never wear a hat like that one, myself. You know what I mean, boys? For one thing, them Mexicans were all too friendly with the Digger Indians for me. Why, they'd give 'em stuff, you know, they give 'em guns and knives to kill us miners with, give 'em pots and pans to cook their food, give 'em horses, which, of course, they eat instead of ride. I'd never wear a hat like that, myself.

Let me see what else is in here. Oh, now, there's a hat kind of more my style, wouldn't you say?

[Men mumble affirmatively]

I couldn't wear this one either, boys, though, 'cause they told me this was the hat that was wore by Jim Marshall. He was the fellow that found the first gold, you know, but he was an ornery cuss. You know me, boys, I'm happy-go-lucky as they come; I never get sad or sore or blue. But old Jim Marshall was always mad about not gettin' rich. Besides which, he also was too friendly with them Digger Indians for me. Those Diggers were all thieves, you know. There was some prospectors from Oregon that was murdered up on the Middle Fork, you remember that, back in '49? They was killed in the night for the gold they had, and everybody knew that Diggers must have done it. Jim Marshall, he took the Digger's part. I'd never wear his hat.

NARRATOR ASSUMES THE CHARACTER OF JAMES MARSHALL, SPEAKING WITH A NEW ENGLAND ACCENT: Yes, I discovered the gold in the tailrace at Sutter's Mill. Myself and some Mormon boys put up that sawmill for Captain John Sutter. I came out west from New England, came out on the Oregon Trail, came down into California that way. Found employment at Sutter's Fort. Well, Captain Sutter wanted a sawmill built in the mountains nearby, and I accepted the job, as I was quite familiar with the business. By January of '48 we had the lower story up, and we were framing the upper story.

On or about the 19th of January in 1848, I myself discovered the gold. I say myself because others now claim to have made the discovery, or to have been there with me; but I was entirely

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alone. I picked up two or three pieces and examined them closely, and I knew there are only two substances resembling this: sulphates of iron, which is bright but brittle, and gold, bright but malleable. I then tried it between two rocks, and I found it could be beaten into a different shape but not broken. I then showed it to the Mormons at the sawmill.

Four days later I went down to the fort for provisions, and I carried with me three ounces of gold, which Sutter and I tested with nitric acid. He pronounced it to be pure gold.

The following day Captain Sutter himself came to Coloma, and we made an examination of the tailrace of the mill, and we had a conversation with all hands up there, and we made an agreement with this tribe of Indians to lease a tract of land from them for three years. Rent was to be a supply of shirts and peas and flour and other goods; they agreed not to kill our livestock.

Well, around the middle of April, strangers from Sutter's Fort and then from San Francisco began to come up and snoop around. Many of them expected me to show them the very places where they should mine for gold. By June the valley was completely overrun, and I could not prevent these men from digging for gold on the very land that Sutter and I had leased from the Digger Indians.

The great rush of men came in '49. The first outsiders to come down were from Oregon, as I had done myself. Here were men who had had Indian troubles up there, and yes, certain, they had trouble with the Digger Indians here as well. They were men so violent they would denounce any man who advanced any reason why a wholesale slaughter should not be made! They deceived a group of Indians into coming to Coloma by telling them that I wished to speak with them, and then they murdered them in cold blood.

Many Indians were killed in those few days, some at Weber Creek, others at Spanish Bar, and I became an object of hatred among these Oregon men, and also among the Digger Indians who felt themselves betrayed by me. I was obliged to leave Coloma until the mob dispersed, or until the Indians had been made to know the truth, that I had not brought these murderers into the mountains to kill them. I could not believe the circumstances of my finding gold were to deprive me of my rights as a settler and an American citizen, but such I soon found to be the case.

Men came to Coloma who lived honesty and honor at home, and then commenced a course of rascality, of which Sutter and I were the principal subjects. Fourteen yoke of oxen were stolen and butchered, six head of horses, plank and tools were stolen, Indians were set against me who sought my life!

Ah, and many also will give false information of who discovered the gold. Thus, this quiet man, who aspired to no notoriety, might be robbed of the name as well as the property. Well, I ask no more than justice and truth. The Mormons and others employed by me at that time, I found to be men of honor. But when I think of the past, . . . God forgive me if I have but little confidence in man.

NARRATOR RESUMES ORIGINAL CHARACTER, SPEAKING WITH A COUNTRY ACCENT:
No, that hat just won't speak for me either, boys. I gotta see what else is in here. Oh, looky

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there; they left us a, that's what's called a mandolin, ain't it? I wonder if I can find a tune on this.

[Men mumble affirmatively]

What would you like to hear? A little "Turkey in the Straw?"

[He begins to play the mandolin and sing:]

Oh, I had a little chicken and she had a wooden leg,
The best old chicken that ever laid an egg,
She laid more eggs than we had on the farm.
None of them would break, wouldn't do me no harm.
Turkey in the straw, haw, haw, haw.
Turkey in the hay, hey, hey, hey.
Roll 'em up and twist 'em up
A high tuck a haw,
And hit 'em up a tune called
Turkey in the Straw.

I wonder what else we got in here. Oh, now, lookit there, there's a hat that would tell you a hard luck story, boys, that hat there was Captain Sutter's.

[Men mumble sympathetically]

That poor man, you know, he had bad luck from beginning to end. He started off with an empire; wound up with nothing more than a stack of bills he couldn't pay . . .

NARRATOR ASSUMES CHARACTER OF JOHN SUTTER, SPEAKING WITH A SWISS ACCENT: It was in January 1848 that gold was discovered at my sawmill, which was then building in the mountains. I was very much in need of a sawmill to get lumber to finish my flouring mill, which was then building at the same time on the lower part of the river.

It was on a rainy afternoon in January when Mr. Marshall arrived at the fort, very wet, and he told me he had some important and interesting news. He wanted me to go with him to a place where we should not be disturbed, so I go with him to my private room. He requested me to lock the door.

Then, Mr. Marshall began to show me this metal, which consists of small pieces of specimens. And he told me he had expressed his opinion to the laborers at the mill that it might be gold, and some of them were laughing at him and calling him a crazy man, and could not believe such a thing. After having tested the metal with aquafortis, I pronounced this to be gold of the finest quality.

Mr. Marshall had no more rest or patience, and off he starts for Coloma in the heaviest rain, taking nothing with him to eat. Well, I took this news very easily, like all other occurrences, good or bad. But I thought a great deal about it during the night, about the consequences which must follow such a discovery.

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On the following day I myself went to Coloma, and I went on a prospecting promenade in the tailrace of the sawmill, and I myself picked up several small pieces of gold. I then had a conversation with all hands, and I told them I would consider it as a great favor to me to keep this discovery a secret for six weeks, that I might finish my flouring mill which was then building and had already cost me twenty-four-thousand dollars. The people up there agreed to keep it a secret so long.

Well, on my way back to the fort, instead of feeling happy and contented, I was unhappy. I could not see that this would benefit me much. And at the same time I thought it hardly likely the people up there would keep it a secret for six weeks. And in this I was not mistaken, for two weeks later I sent up a man in charge of some supplies who was well acquainted with all hands up there, and Mrs. Wimmer told him the whole secret!

When this man came back to the fort he went to a small store in one of my outside buildings kept by Mr. Samuel Brannan, and asked for a bottle of brandy, and he pays for the brandy with small pieces of gold. The storekeeper came to me in great haste, and I told him at once the truth. I had to tell him all about it!

So, soon as the secret was out, my laborers began to leave, in small groups at first, but then everyone left, from the clerk to the cook, and I was in great distress. The Mormons did not like to leave my flouring mill unfinished, but they got the gold fever like everybody else.

What a great misfortune was this gold discovery to me; it has just broken up and ruined all my hard labor. From my mill buildings I reaped no benefit whatsoever; even my mill stones have been stolen and sold. My tannery, which was then in a flourishing condition, was abandoned. And so it was with all the other mechanical trades I had carried on; all was abandoned, all was left, to an immense loss for me. By this gold discovery all my hard labors are destroyed. Had I succeeded with my wares and manufacturies a few years more, I should have been the richest citizen on the Pacific shore. But it had to be different; instead of being rich I am ruined. Those who became rich were Mr. Samuel Brannan and the other merchants, and also the squatters who stole all of my land.

NARRATOR RESUMES ORIGINAL CHARACTER, SPEAKING WITH A COUNTRY ACCENT: You know, it was only one in a thousand that ever got rich, you know boys. Most everybody wound up dead broke, like Captain Sutter, like me, like you. It's only the purveyors of merchandise, the likes of Sam . . . Sam Brannan, winding up with all the gold. Never touched a spade to the ground; he's wound up with all the gold.

You know, I was down in 'Frisco when Sam Brannan came down there yellin' "Gold in the American River!" Oh, what high hopes we had. When I heard Brannan's words, it was like a frenzy seized my soul. Piles of gold rose up before me, castles of marble, thousands of slaves, myriads of fair virgins contending with each other for my love, were among the fancies of my fevered imagination. The Rothschilds, Gerards, and Astors appeared to me but poor people. In short, I had a very violent attack of the gold fever. But we all wound up dead broke because of the high prices. It was the purveyors of merchandise, of the likes of Sam Brannan, that wound up with all the gold. Well, I'm an honest, hard-working, God-fearing man; I'd never wear a hat like this.

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NARRATOR ASSUMES CHARACTER OF SAM BRANNAN: Gold! Gold in the American River! Gold! My Friends, my fellow Americans, I'm here to tell you. I, Sam Brannan, here to tell you. Now you've all heard those stories of men finding gold up and down the American River; I'm here to tell you those stories are true. Now, don't listen to those who'd have you think the mines are all humbug. The miners are finding hundreds of ounces of gold in all the creeks and canyons up the American River.

If you would know where to find gold, visit one of my stores, which are conveniently located at Sutter's Fort and Mormon Island in Coloma. The keepers of my stores are knowledgeable individuals who will give you the latest tips on how and where to dig for gold.

And, of course, my stores also carry the most complete line of mining supplies in the Gold Country: we have six-barrel revolvers, we have Kentucky long rifles, we have powder and ball shot ammunition, we have belt axes, and money belts made exclusively for gold.

I have three barges to carry mining supplies, from San Francisco up to my landing place, which I call Sacramento. After all, I was one of the first men on the scene. When gold was first presented at my store for payment, well, I took the news as eagerly as everyone else, but my actions were different. Everyone else, to a man, dropped what they were doing and went to Coloma to dig for gold, while I went in the opposite direction. I went down to San Francisco and I began to buy everything I could find that I knew miners would want to use, because I was convinced that mining supplies would soon be in great demand, and I wanted to be able to supply them, and my foresight has paid off. And now Brannan and Company has the largest stock of mining supplies in the Gold Country, and the best locations. My stores are paying handsomely.

Well, I came out west with some other Mormons in '46. Had the first printing press in San Francisco; established the first newspaper there. It was in my newspaper, *The California Star*, that the gold discovery was first announced. And, being an elder in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, I was obligated to see how the Mormon miners were doing, so I visited them first at Coloma and then at the new mining camp of Mormon Island, and I found the Mormon miners doing very well indeed; they were finding a lot of gold.

Well, I collected tithes from them, for the greater glory of the Lord, and then I went again to San Francisco. And I showed the gold to everyone in a quinine bottle, and I announced the news, "Gold! Gold in the American River! Gold!" I also printed two-thousand copies of my newspaper, packed them on the mules, and sent them toward Missouri to get the rush started.

You see, my fellow Americans, I have great plans for this California. I intend for little San Francisco to be one of the premier cities of America. And my landing place, Sacramento, will also one day grow to be a large city. I will build banks, I will build railroads, hotels, famous resorts, yea, I will even build cities, and yes, hence you will hear the name Samuel Brannan, who commenced the Gold Rush, and improved so greatly upon the quality of life for everyone.

[Narrator resumes original character, speaking with a country accent:] You know, that rascal Brannan, he was just making life harder for everyone. He just sits there behind the store counter and rakes the gold into barrels behind as the miners bring it in to him. Miners are

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doing all the work of digging the gold out of the ground, only to turn it over to the purveyors of merchandise of the likes of him.

Speaking of barrels, we're just about down to the bottom here; nothin' left now but this old skin. You know, they told me this was wore by one of them Digger boys that was killed by the Oregons, back in '49. Do you remember that? That was up on Middle Fork. There was some fellas there that was killed in the night for the gold they had. Well, everybody knew that Diggers must have done it, so they, you know, they got up a posse. And they went out there rounding up Digger Indians. They got some at Michigan Flat, and some up at Spanish Dry Diggins. Had to kill some to take them captive, I heard.

They brought a group of about forty or so back here to Coloma. They had a trial, and they decided that they'd find seven of them guilty, kill them just to teach the other ones a lesson. And Jim Marshall, Jim Marshall tried to get up and make 'em stop. But they was just a mob, and they swore to kill him, too, if he tried to interfere.

Then them seven Digger Indians broke and ran and tried to get away, and the Oregon boys dropped 'em as they ran. Some of them Diggers still got away and got down into the river and tried to swim across, but the Oregon boys went across the river on John Little's ferry and met 'em on the other side, as they tried to pull 'em out of the river and smashed in their heads with rocks. One of them Digger boys had this old skin wrapped around him there where he fell.

NARRATOR ASSUMES CHARACTER OF A NISENAN, SPEAKING WITH A NATIVE AMERICAN ACCENT: My people are Nisenan; this place is our home. I have lived all my life in this place. Here we have been since Earth Mother taught kuksu the names of the different animals, and taught the people to gather acorns and make baskets. Here we have lived in peace for long ages.

Before the strangers came there were many Nisenan. There was always plenty. We ate the ooti, what you call acorn. The ooti we gathered in baskets and stored it to eat it later. Besides ooti, we had bulbs and seeds and fish. Earth Mother was generous with her gifts; everything was at peace. Everything was connected together. When anyone become sad or afraid, the Earth and all the animals would become sad or afraid with them, because everything is connected together. When the Earth was happy, Nisenan were happy too, because everything is connected together.

We were afraid when the strangers came. First, the news came to us by Nisenan runner. They said, "Something has come down from the sky; strangers without families who speak a strange tongue. They have come from the western edge of the world. They are coming to your villages, to your side." We were afraid of the strangers. They had poison sticks to kill Nisenan. Some of them had cross sticks, they wore long brown robes, they poured sacred water on people's heads, they told people they were lost souls. They said the Great Spirit is a human being who lives up in the clouds somewhere. These ideas are strange to Nisenan. To us, the Great Spirit is in the sacred lakes, and in the mountains, and in the sky, everywhere. We have the Sun, which is the Creator's brother; we have the Moon, which is the sister.

One day I saw an omen. I saw Coyote in the hot, middle part of the day, when Coyote is not seen, and as I watched, Coyote stopped and stared, and turned away and disappeared, and it

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was the sign for the death of the people. Good could no longer exist. And the people began all to die. They died of fevers and shaking and great suffering. So many people died we could not bury them. Whole families died all together. Whole villages died all together. We ran away from our villages to hide, but the sicknesses followed us.

And it was soon after that the man called Sutter came up the river in boats, with eight men and two women. And we were afraid; we tried to scare them away, but they came on. Later some Nisenan stayed with this Sutter at his fort, and made adobes for him, and then some men came from Sutter's up to Coloma. They came, they said, to make a saw that would cut by itself. We did not believe it was possible. But we did not harm them; they did not harm us. Their chief was a man called Marshall, who greeted us kindly and gave us presents.

Then some men came and worked with this Marshall on the digging for the water. That is when they found the yellow dirt, and our world came apart after that. So many men came to look for yellow dirt, as many as the stars in the sky.

There were many bad men who killed Nisenan with their poison sticks. They hunted us like animals and killed us. They burned up our storages of ooti with fire, to make us die. They burned our sweat lodges and our roundhouses. They cut down the acorn trees that fed us. They destroyed even the river that fed us with fish. And even as we ran away, starving, into the mountains, the sicknesses followed us, and we died of fevers and shaking.

And all of that happened only a few seasons ago. Now there are few Nisenan left. All of my family is gone, all of my friends are dead. The trees that supplied us with food are gone. Even the river is now just a muddy ditch where thousands of strangers are looking for the yellow dirt. Even the river is dead.

NARRATOR RESUMES ORIGINAL CHARACTER, SPEAKING WITH A COUNTRY ACCENT:
Well boys, I've come to a decision. I've decided I'm just gonna keep this old hat. It'll serve me for a few years more. I can't take the chance of wearing the wrong hat, boys; you just can't do that. You're never going to be able to tell what it might say.

Running Time: 35 minutes

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