



California State Parks Video Transcript



Shasta State Historic Park Orientation Video

It all began with gold. It was the spring of 1848 . . . the great California Gold Rush was just getting underway. Two hundred miles north of Coloma, where gold was first discovered on the American River, Pierson B. Reading, the only white settler in what is today Shasta County was searching the rivers and creeks near his rancho for signs of the precious metal. And there it was, gold in Northern California! So much gold that in one six week period, Reading's crew of 66 local Indians removed \$80,000 worth from his Trinity River claim. News of Reading's discoveries traveled fast, and the rush to the Northern Mines was on.

The arriving miners chose a site with a plentiful supply of fresh water and lumber as their base of operations. They named it Reading's Springs. All roads heading North from San Francisco and Sacramento ended there. By the summer of 1849, just one year after Reading's discovery of gold, Reading's Springs was crowded with over 500 canvas tents. For a miner, the canvas cloth of his tent was adequate protection from the heat of the summer sun, but as the rain and cold winds of winter set in, more permanent and reliable shelter was needed. The first log cabins and wooden shelters were built.

The following summer of 1850 saw Reading's Springs continue to grow as an important mining center. It was then that a group of prominent miners gathered together to choose a name they felt was more befitting a town of such growing importance and prosperity. After much spirited debate and heated argument, the group decided on the name Shasta City. With a new name and a feeling of excitement in the air, Shasta City's commercial success was guaranteed when it was learned it had been chosen as the County Seat for the newly formed Shasta County.

A lumber mill began operation and wood frame buildings started appear along Main Street. Many miners who had not struck it rich at mining, decided to once again take up the professions they had left back home. By 1852, Shasta City had become a major commercial center.

At times business in Shasta was so lively that Main Street became difficult and even dangerous to cross. Not even the two disastrous fires that destroyed nearly all of the commercial center of town could slow its growth. Townspeople simply rebuilt with brick and iron instead of wood.

For several years Shasta had the world by the tail. The town supported dry goods stores, saloons, hotels, newspapers, barbershops, bakeries, breweries and bookstores. Over 5 million dollars in gold passed through Shasta in just one year. More and more permanent homes were built along with schools and churches. For the next several years, life was good for the people of Shasta...but change was on the horizon.

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By the late 1860's, most of the rich gold claims had been mined out. Shasta's importance as a transportation center was threatened when the stage route that brought so many travelers and their money into town was moved...the new route passed Shasta by. Hopes were raised with the news that the Central Pacific Railroad was planning a new track and station in Northern California. But when the track was laid and the new station built, it was six miles east of Shasta. There, a new town grew quickly; its name was Redding.

Eager to take part in Redding's booming growth, many of Shasta's business owners left town. Buildings in Shasta were taken apart, their bricks and iron used to construct Redding's new businesses. Shasta's original downtown district was becoming a ghost town.

Recognizing Shasta's value in helping to tell the story of California's history, a movement to save the few remaining buildings began in the 1920s. In June of 1950, Shasta State Historic Park was officially dedicated. Today you can visit carefully restored buildings that house a wide variety of exhibits. The outdoor trails throughout the park will lead you to historical cemeteries, the original brick ruins, and an 1859 pioneer barn with a picnic area. So bring your spirit of adventure, explore. Whether you have just one hour or an entire afternoon, Shasta State Historic Park is eager to share this unique chapter in the story of California's Gold Rush.

Running Time: 6 minutes
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