US Gold Bureau Celebrates the 171st Anniversary of the California Gold Rush with Gold Coins from the Era and 8 Mysterious Facts You Didn't Know.

To celebrate the 171st anniversary of the California Gold Rush on January 24th, we’re diving into some of these lesser-known facts and bringing you our top 8 things you may not know about the discovery of gold in America. Released by the United States Gold Bureau.

AUSTIN, Texas (PRWEB) January 27, 2019 -- Tales of ambitious trailblazers striking it rich in the California Gold Rush of the mid-1800s loom large in our national narrative. While there are countless uplifting stories of these pioneering souls peppered throughout our history, there are also many aspects of the Gold Rush era that get drowned out by the glitz and glam of the “strike it rich” lore.

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The first U.S. gold discovery was not in California, nor was the Gold Rush the first time gold was discovered in California.

While perhaps colloquially thought of as the first time gold was discovered in America, the California Gold Rush did not mark the initial unearthing of the precious metal in the country. Sometimes referred to as the first “world-class” event of its kind, the California Gold Rush was instead when large-scale gold production first came into play.

In fact, gold mining had been happening in the U.S. since gold was discovered in North Carolina in 1799 on the Reed farm – a whole 50 years before the California Gold Rush gets underway. Even before that point, minor domestic gold production took place – also in North Carolina – as early as 1793.

The California Gold Rush kicked off on January 24, 1848, when American carpenter and sawmill operator, James W. Marshall found pieces of the precious metal at the construction site of the soon-to-be Sutter’s Mill in Coloma, California.

Before Marshall's discovery, gold had already been found in the region by a native Californian named Francisco Lopez. In 1842, while attempting to track down a herd of lost horses, Lopez discovered a gold nugget in a bundle of onions he dug up from the banks of a small creek. The site was located in what would later be known as Placerita Canyon, about 30 miles northwest of present-day Los Angeles. He went on to unearth even more gold from the site, compelling him and others to continue and also expand their search to nearby areas.

California was still part of Mexico when its Gold Rush began.

When the California Gold Rush kicked off in January 1848, the region was technically still part of Mexico, although it was under American military control as a result of the Mexican-American War. The war would end a little over a week later on February 2, 1848, with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Upon initiation of the treaty, California became a possession of the United States, although it was never a formal
“territory.” The region wouldn’t become a state for another two and a half years.

The increase in population from the Gold Rush directly led to California’s statehood in 1850. After all was said and done, the mid-1800s Gold Rush drew approximately 300,000 new residents to California. Most newcomers migrated from other parts of America, but some came from foreign lands including the Sandwich Islands (present-day Hawaii), Mexico, Peru, Chile, Britain, Europe, Australia, and even China.

As a result, demand for a more representative and functional regional government grew, eventually necessitating the formation of a Constitutional Convention in 1849. A constitution was drafted and adopted the same year, followed by California officially becoming a state the following year. The granting of statehood was part of the Compromise of 1850.

A few years into the Gold Rush, most of the easily accessible gold – which was collected by simple panning or other low-grade methods – had been obtained. This increasingly smaller supply led to tensions among miners, and many foreigners were eventually driven out of the gold fields by American workers. Chinese immigrants endured some of the most extreme animosity, with cases of violence and blatant racism wielded against the group.

Continued antagonism toward foreigners eventually led to legislative restrictions on the earnings or operations of non-American miners, including the Foreign Miners Tax, passed by California’s first legislature in 1850, and later, the Chinese Exclusion Act.

While one could argue that the California Gold Rush is generally thought of a positive occurrence, many negative repercussions were felt across the region. The sudden surge in mining operations put tremendous strain on the natural landscape and indigenous peoples. Catastrophic natural disasters ensued, and the decimation of many Native Americans came about as direct results of the rapidly changing environment of California.

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