

California Gold Rush was sparked by a failed Oregon farmer

Had James Marshall stayed in Oregon for one more month, he likely never would have left; instead, he headed south and found gold. And the discovery led more or less straight to his ruin.

Most residents of Western Oregon complain about the rain — especially this time of year. But arguably nobody has ever had more cause to complain about the soggy Willamette Valley climate than James W. Marshall.

Marshall was a carpenter by trade, originally from New Jersey. Looking for new opportunities in the West, he settled on a land claim in Missouri in 1844, along the Platte River — and promptly contracted malaria. Seeking a more healthy climate, he joined a late-departing wagon train heading out the Oregon Trail, and arrived in the Willamette Valley late that year.

Of course, when he arrived he was greeted by the most miserable weather the Beaver State can dish out. Taking a claim, he tried to tough it out; but by late Spring, the rain had only gotten slightly warmer, and he was feeling sicker than ever.

Finally, as the month of June made an unseasonably soggy and miserable appearance, he decided he'd had enough. He packed his things and headed south, along the Siskiyou Trail, into what was then the Mexican territory of Alta California.

A month or so later, he found himself in Sutter's Fort, the first non-Native settlement in the California Central Valley, near what today is Sacramento. Sutter's Fort was owned by John Sutter, a German fellow who was the alcalde (mayor, basically) of the settlement under a grant from the government of Mexico.

An 1840s hand-tinted engraving of Sutter's Fort as it appeared in its heyday. (Image: F. Gleason/ Wikimedia)

Mayor Sutter dreamed of building an empire there in the balmy uplands of central California, and when Marshall — who was, remember, a skilled carpenter — arrived, he was very happy to see him. Soon the two of them were in partnership on various projects. Sutter helped Marshall buy some land and cattle, and for a little while it looked like he was finally on his feet. But then the Mexican-American war broke out and Marshall, who seems to have had some issues with impulse control, abandoned his new farm and joined the Bear Flag Rebellion under General John Fremont.

Upon his return some nine months later, Marshall found all his cattle gone — stolen, most likely. Without any livestock, he couldn't make his farm payments, so he

lost the land.

Then Sutter hired him to oversee construction and subsequent operation of a water-powered sawmill, to provide the wood with which Sutter's dreamed-of inland empire would be built. Marshall scouted a likely spot on the American River, and construction got under way. Things went well, but when it was done Marshall realized the tailrace — the canal that carried the water away after it turned the water wheel — was too narrow to let the water properly drive the saws.

To fix this, he started coming down to the mill late at night, opening the sluice gates, and letting the full impoundment of water roar down through the channel. Out of fear that a worker would be swept away and drowned, he didn't do this during the day. He would then come in the morning, close the sluice gates again, and examine the progress in the temporarily empty tailrace bed.

One morning, when he was doing this, he found something in the bed that sparkled. It was a cluster of large yellow stones. When he beat on one, it smashed flat.

Marshall, in a state of considerable excitement, showed the discovery to his construction crew. He gave them permission to hunt around for more gold during the lunch break. And then he saddled up and headed for Sutter's place, to tell the boss about it.

Sutter, when he found out, was horrified. He understood what Marshall did not: that with easy money under foot, nobody would ever do a lick of actual work again until it was all dug up. And if no workers could be hired, his dreamed-of empire would never be built.

Sutter raced to the mill to beg everyone who knew to keep the find a secret, just for a few months, until the mill could be built.

Of course, word got out. Of course, the labor market dried up as every able-bodied worker grabbed a gold pan and hit the hills. Of course, the mills languished and Sutter lost his invest-

ment.

Had Sutter and Marshall cut their losses at that moment and thrown themselves into the race, collecting all the gold they could get their hands on as fast as they could, they would have wound up rich men — probably richer than Sutter had dreamed his agrarian empire would make him. But they did not. Both of them continued stubbornly trying to make money the old-fashioned way, struggling to build Sutter's empire with hired labor while billions of dollars in gold crunched beneath their feet.

Eventually Sutter found himself plagued with aggressive squatters who hired lawyers to try to defeat his land claim, which was originally through the Mexican government. The squatters also filched food from his fields and stole his cattle.

“By this sudden discovery of the gold, all my great plans were destroyed. Had I succeeded for a few years before the gold was discovered, I would have been the richest citizen on the Pacific shore; but it had to be different. Instead of being rich, I am ruined,” he wrote in 1857 in Hutchings' California Magazine.

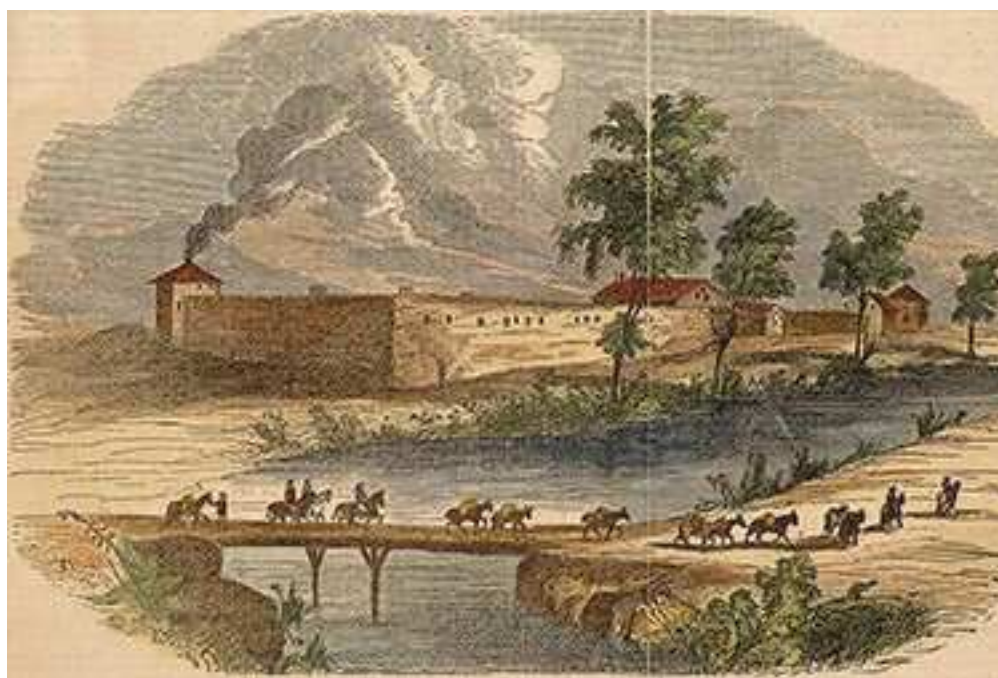
Marshall fared even worse. The squatters forced him off his land and he lacked the resources to fight them. Like Sutter, he became a miner only reluctantly and not very successfully. He tried a vineyard, which worked well for a few years but eventually failed as well. In the end, he wound up in a tiny cabin eking out a living with a subsistence garden.

Ironically, if he'd stayed in the Willamette Valley just one more month and experienced Oregon in the dry part of spring, he probably never would have left — and his great-grandchildren might still be farming his land there today.

(Sources: Friedman, Ralph. Tales Out of Oregon. Sausalito, CA: Pars Publishing, 1967; “James Marshall: California's Gold Discoverer,” Historynet.com (Wild West magazine), 6-12-2006



A Daguerrotype by R.H. Vance shows what remained, in around 1850, of the sawmill James Marshall was working on when he found the gold in the tailrace. The man in the picture is likely a photographer's assistant. (Image: Library of Congress)



An 1840s hand-tinted engraving of Sutter's Fort as it appeared in its heyday. (Image: F. Gleason/ Wikimedia)

PUBLIC NOTICE
 TS No. OR07000276-16-1 APN 9143/1003 TO No 8686710 TRUSTEE'S NOTICE OF SALE Reference is made to that certain Trust Deed made by, JOHN M SWANSON AND JUDITH A SWANSON, HUSBAND AND WIFE as Grantor to FIDELITY NATIONAL TITLE COMPANY as Trustee, in favor of MORTGAGE ELECTRONIC REGISTRATION SYSTEMS, INC. (“MERS”), as designated nominee for GENWORTH FINANCIAL HOME EQUITY ACCESS, INC., Beneficiary of the security instrument, its successors and assigns, dated as of August 20, 2011 and recorded on November 18, 2011 as Instrument No. 2011-29156 and the beneficial interest was assigned to Reverse Mortgage Solutions, Inc. and recorded December 8, 2016 as Instrument Number 2016-39375 of official records in the Office of the Recorder of Morrow County, Oregon to-wit: APN: 9143/1003 LOT 14, HILLCREST ESTATES IN THE CITY OF IRRIGON, COUNTY OF MORROW AND STATE OF OREGON. Commonly known as: 995 SE THOMAS AVE, IRRIGON, OR 97844-7194 Both the Beneficiary, Reverse Mortgage Solutions, Inc., and the Trustee, Nathan F. Smith, Esq., OSB #120112, have elected to sell the said real property to satisfy the obligations secured by said Trust Deed and notice has been recorded pursuant to Section 86.735(3) of Oregon Revised Statutes. The default for which the foreclosure is made is the Grantor's failure to pay: Failed to pay the principal balance which became all due and payable based upon the move-out by all mortgagors from the prop-

erty, ceasing to use the property as the principal residence By this reason of said default the Beneficiary has declared all obligations secured by said Trust Deed immediately due and payable, said sums being the following, to-wit: The sum of \$147,765.51 together with interest thereon from August 1, 2016 until paid; and all Trustee's fees, foreclosure costs and any sums advanced by the Beneficiary pursuant to the terms of said Trust Deed. Wherefore, notice is hereby given that, the undersigned Trustee will on July 21, 2017 at the hour of 12:00 PM, Standard of Time, as established by Section 187.110, Oregon Revised Statutes, Court Street entrance steps to the Morrow County Courthouse, 100 Court St, Heppner, OR 97836 County of Morrow, sell at public auction to the highest bidder for cash the interest in the said described real property which the Grantor had or had power to convey at the time of the execution by him of the said Trust Deed, together with any interest which the Grantor or his successors in interest acquired after the execution of said Trust Deed, to satisfy the foregoing obligations thereby secured and the costs and expenses of sale, including a reasonable charge by the Trustee. Notice is further given that any person named in Section 86.753 of Oregon Revised Statutes has the right to have the foreclosure proceeding dismissed and the Trust Deed reinstated by payment to the Beneficiary of the entire amount then due (other than such portion of said principal as would not then be due had no default occurred), together with the costs, Trustee's or attorney's fees and curing any other de-

fault complained of in the Notice of Default by tendering the performance required under the obligation or Trust Deed, at any time prior to five days before the date last set for sale. Without limiting the Trustee's disclaimer of representations or warranties, Oregon law requires the Trustee to state in this notice that some residential property sold at a Trustee's sale may have been used in manufacturing methamphetamine, the chemical components of which are known to be toxic. Prospective purchasers of residential property should be aware of this potential danger before deciding to place a bid for this property at the Trustee's sale. In construing this notice, the masculine gender includes the feminine and the neuter, the singular includes plural, the word “Grantor” includes any successor in interest to the Grantor as well as any other persons owing an obligation, the performance of which is secured by said Trust Deed, the words “Trustee” and “Beneficiary” includes their respective successors in interest, if any. Dated: March 8, 2017 By: Nathan F. Smith, Esq., OSB #120112 Successor Trustee Malcolm & Cisneros, A Law Corporation Attention: Nathan F. Smith, Esq., OSB #120112 c/o TRUSTEE CORPS 17100 Gillette Ave, Irvine, CA 92614 949-252-8300 FOR SALE INFORMATION PLEASE CALL: In Source Logic at 702-659-7766 Website for Trustee's Sale Information: www.insourcelogic.com/SL Number 29083, Pub Dates: 04/26/2017, 05/03/2017, 05/10/2017, 05/17/2017, HEPPNER GAZETTE TIMES Published: April 26, May 3, 10 and 17, 2017 Affidavit

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