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FIRST DISCOVERY
OF GOLD.

- BY -

ELISHA O. CROSBY.

First discovery of gold by Marshall

Havana October 27, 1893,

C. J. S. Gibbs Esq.

President of Society California Pioneer

Dear Sir,

There has been published in
the daily papers various articles
purporting to give the true history of
Marshall's discovery of gold ^{in the month of January 1848.} at Sutter's
saw mill on the South fork of the
American River near the present town
of Colusa in Eldorado County.

The precise date of the find
has been matter of considerable
letter writing, and interviews with
Ancient Argonauts, and almost indubi-
tant of this fertile State of California
and among its many wonderful produc-
tions there is none that can equal
the varying colors and statements
made by these ^{that are known as} Ancient Argonauts, the
whole landed California Argonauts of 1849.

There is a lengthy article in one
of the daily papers of this date, with
the startling headlines beginning with
"His Buried Riches" Marshall's Golden
Nugget Disappears" &c. and then follows
the statement which is said to be
inspired by an Old Argonaut, to the
effect that Mr Allen claims to have
the Simon pure first Nugget of gold
found by Marshall. This claim
of Mr Allen is not admitted by the
Smithsonian Institute of Washington
who claim ^{to have} the Simon pure original
nugget of gold found by Marshall
and said to have ^{been} given by Captain
Sutter to Captain Folsom and by Capt
Folsom given into the trusted keep of
the Smithsonian Institute.

Now this explanation is backed
by one ^{and true} Argonaut who claims to have had a
personal acquaintance with Mr

Marshall as early as April 1849
that being the date of his arrival,
by way of Panama, to the
gold placers of California; that he
had the story from Marshall, how
he first discovered gold, and also
that he made the acquaintance of Mr
and Mrs Wimmer who lived near to
Sutter's saw mill, ^{and kept boarders} and her story
of the first gold find, and how Mrs
Wimmer tried to solve the question
of its being gold by boiling it in soap and
lye during her labors at that time in
making up a ~~small~~ barrel of soft soap
according to the custom of western women

I have full faith to believe the
honesty of the Ancient Argonaut and
that he fully believed the truth of the matter as
printed, for I have always found their
statements entertaining, especially when
describing the stirring events of the early
days of 1849, and if there discrepancies
and the relation of the old Argonauts

differ materially I cannot find it
in my heart to discredit ^{one} the or the
other and I let it down to the difference
people look upon the same event,
besides the difficulty inherent in
human nature to remember ^{accurately} and relate
the same history of things done ~~and said~~
so long ago as the ^{in the same way} beginning of 1849. ^{the same things}
I bespeak, at this time, as to
my own relation of events that I
saw and heard about in ^{early days} which
^{charity} I cheerfully give to the Old Argonaut
who arrived in April 1849 by way of
the Isthmus of Panama, and as I
came over the same route in January
preceeding and arrived in San Fran-
cisco the 28th of February 1849, I had
a months experience in this gold
country before the Argonaut of April
therefore I must have heard Marshall & Neighbors ^{story}
arrived. I arrived at Sutters Fort about
the 10th of March and there met Captain
Sutter with whom I maintained a

an intimate acquaintance as long
as he remained in California.

As I was among the first to arrive
at Sutters Fort from the Eastern States
Captain Sutter related very fully
all the circumstances connected
with Marshall building the saw
mill and finding the particles of
gold in the Mill race below the
water wheel of the mill, and he
described the circumstances thus wise
as Captain Sutter said. When
the Mill was completed and the
water wheel put in place, they then
raised the water gate to start the
wheel to run but it only turned a
few times and then stopped; the
ditch below was not deep ^{and wide} enough to
carry off the water, that ^{the water} backed up
on the water wheel and stopped its motion.

Marshall directed the gates to be
opened so that a full flow of water

would assist in widening
and deepening the tail race, and
after this rush of water had run
off that Marshall found these
bright particles of metal, about the
size of flax seed, and as he began
to pick them up he put them in a
piece of paper until he had gathered
up a half ounce, and as he looked it
over Marshall thought that
these particles of bright metal might
be gold, and that night Marshall
rode down to Sutter's Fort and showed
his little package of gold dust to Captain
Sutter, who described it as small
particles of metal about the size of
flax seed or small apple seeds and
very bright and smooth, worn by the
wash of the sand and gravel. They
pounded it and found it worked very
easily and soft and then Captain Sutter
tried it with such vinegar and assidue

as he had, - Some of these tests had
any effect to tarnish or make these
particles turn black or change color
so he thought it was gold, and this
little sample Captain Sutter sent by
one of his launches to San Francisco to
be tested by a jeweler who said it was gold.
I went to Mormon Island about
March 12. 1849. and I there found 60
to 70 men washing gold out of the sand
and gravel of the Island and banks
of the North ^{branches} and South forks of the
American River. I bought some
of this gold for \$10. the ounce ^{as I paid} as I had
some coin which the miners seemed
very anxious to get, ~~as~~ coin was very
scarce and difficult to get for gold
dust, at that time. I found only fine
flax seed gold as it was called, and very
rarely any pieces as large as an apple
or a cucumber seed and all old miners
will readily see that these bright particles

that had been tarnished bright and
by the gravel and sand as it washed them out
shiny, were most likely to attract
Marshall's attention.

When I arrived at Sutters Saw Mill
on the 13th of March 1849, I met Marshall
and was told by him all the details
about his discovery of gold in the ^{saw} mill
race, and the tests he and captain
Sutter made, when he first took the
little package of shining particles to the
Fort for Sutters inspection.

Marshall expressed the idea
that if the mill race had been dug
deeper enough in the first place, to carry
off the water from the wheel that the
gold would not have been found
at that time. His failure to dig the
ditch deep enough in the first instance
and the experiment to wash out the
bottom of the ditch with the water,
~~above~~ exposed these bright particles
that attracted his attention, and as

he began to examine them more closely
he found they were a heavy metal
and the possibility that they were gold
caused him to think it best to show it
to Captain Sutter and get his opinion as
to what kind of metal it really was,

Marshall's story agreed so naturally
with the account given to me by Captain
Sutter, as well as the lay of the place
as I saw it, while Marshall himself
was explaining the facts, as we stood on
the bank overlooking the ditch where
he first picked up the shining particles
of metal that proved to be gold, that I
am of the opinion Marshall did not
first discover a nugget or lump of gold
the size of a walnut or any thing like
the size of the specimen described in Mr
Allen's possession or the specimen in the
possession of the Smithsonian Institution
in Washington, or anybody else, but that
Marshall's attention was attracted to the

shining particles of metal he saw
in the bottom of the ditch, that had
been uncovered by the rush of water
he had caused to be sent down from
above to wash out the dirt.

The early miners will all agree that
fine gold was first found near the
surface of the ground, and was washed
out substantially as Marshall had
done when he first discovered the bright
particles that proved to be gold, but
nuggets and larger pieces were only
found deep down, or in crevices of the
rocks.

Marshall's find and his visit to
Sutter's Fort was no secret to the men
employed with him to build the saw
mill as they all knew of the failure
to work the wheel on account of the
back water in the ditch and as some
of them assisted to turn the head of
water through the ditch to wash it out

they examined the ditch afterwards to see what effect the rush of waters had done to lower its bottom grade.

The next day there was some curiosity about Marshall's trip down to Sutter's Fort and several pieces of the shining metal was picked up and among the find one of Wimmer's boys had found the largest, which Mr. Wimmer put in the kettle of boiling soap to see if it would stand the test of alkali, and as it proved to have no other effect than to make it still more bright, it was considered satisfactory to all the boarders that Mr. Wimmer had the first lump of gold found at Sutter's saw mill.

I heard Mr. Wimmer tell the story at the time I first visited Sutter Mill 13th of March 1849, and as his table was the best at that place I was for a few days a boarder at her house.

Mrs Wimmer as well as her husband declared that they were as much the discoverers of gold as Marshall, the only thing was Marshall went down to Sutter's Fort first to show it to Captain Sutter and in that way got the credit of discovering gold first.

I saw the Wimmer specimen that had been boiled in soap and alkalye by Mrs Wimmer, and treasured by her as the first good specimen of gold found at Sutter's Saw Mill, and then the specimen was about the size of a marrowfat pea, although irregular in shape, and had evidently been pounded.

Several years later my attention was called to a specimen of gold, said to be the original Wimmer specimen that Mrs Wimmer boiled in her soap kettle, but as it had come down to San Francisco and was several times larger than the specimen Mrs Wimmer showed me at her house in March 1849.

I concluded it had grown in keeping
with the growth of the city of San Francisco
when it was then exhibited

Captain Sutter enjoyed a quiet joke as
heartily as most men, and he said the
eastern people all wanted specimens of
gold that was first found in the mines,
that he gave away a great many to those
who arrived at first from the east, but the
request for early specimens was so great, that
he finally had no more to give, but in his
kindly way told the last arrivals that the
supply in the mines was abundant to
give every one a first find who would
take the trouble to look for specimens in the
mines

I hope every one who possesses the first
nugget of gold found in the mines of California
whether picked up by Marshall, Wimmer
or themselves will cherish it in kind remembrance
of the golden State.

Genl. W. J. Sherman was in California
in 1848, and then a Lieutenant on Col Mason's
staff, when they visited officially the gold
mines for the purpose of giving a report to
the U. S. Govt at Washington

It will be remembered that Genl W. J.
^{then a Lieutenant}
Sherman was in California in 1848, and with
Col Mason ^{in July} visited Sutter's Fort and the mines
along the American River up to Sutter's Saw
Mill where Marshall first discovered gold,
and in his memoir says, "As Marshall himself
"was working in in this ditch, he observed particles
"of yellow metal which he gathered upon his
"chance, when it seemed to him suddenly
"flashed across his mind that it was gold."
"After picking up about an ounce he
"hurried down to the Fort to report to Captain
"Sutter his discovery."

Again Lieutenant, Review of the Navy in his
"Tour of Duty in California" says, "Marshall to save
"labor let the water directly into the race with a
"strong current so as to wash it wider and deeper

"He effected his purpose, and a large bed
"of mud and gravel was carried to the
"foot of the race. "one day Marshall
"as he was walking down the race to this deposit
"of mud. Observed some glittering particles at
"its upper edge, he gathered a few, examined
"them, and became satisfied of their value."
"He then went to the Fort, told Captain Sutter
"of his discovery."

Thos O. Larkin in his report to Mr Buchanan

June 1, 1848, says

"on the American fork of the Sacramento River
"there has been within the present year dis-
"covered a placer, a vast tract of land con-
"taining gold in small particles." This gold
"thus far has been taken on the banks of
"the river from the surface to eighteen inches
"deep"

From what Marshall told me
on the spot when he first discovered
gold and the description of the widening
and deepening of the tail race or ditch, by

sending a strong current of water
down from the dam above, I believe he
found the shining particles of gold not
larger than flax seed or apple seeds, and
that the gold he first found and took to the
Fort to show Captain Sutter was these small
particles found by surface washing in
the tail race or ditch described by Sutter
and this seems to be the opinion of Gen Sherman
Lieutenant Keown and Thos. B. Larkin who were
early witnesses to the events of gold discovery.

in 1848, as quoted above to sustain my
theory that Marshall did not find at first a nugget or lump
of gold larger than the size of an
apple seed, and that the specimens shown
by the Smithsonian Institute, or any one else
of the size of a hickory nut or larger, came
from later finds, and are none of them the
real gold first discovered by Marshall,

