

SUTTER'S FORT



By Courtesy of The Wednesday Press

SUTTER'S FORT

Destiny of nations has often been determined by the unconscious act of a man. In 1839, John A. Sutter adventured up the Sacramento River and landed near the point where the American River joins the Sacramento. Three miles out he established the Fort that bears his name and that then was the farthest western fortification on the hemisphere. Sutter was a Swiss by birth; born in the Grand Duchy of Baden, February 28, 1803. There he was reared and educated. To his credit it may be remarked that he spoke and wrote fluently four languages. In his early

life he developed a spirit of adventure, entered the military service of France as Captain under Charles X., and there remained until he arrived at the age of thirty. He arrived in New York in 1834. His object was to prepare the way for a colony of his countrymen in the West, and he located in Missouri. From there he made a journey of exploration to New Mexico, and here is the secret of his later settling in the Sacramento Valley, and the important results that flowed from it. He encountered trappers who had crossed to the Pacific Coast, and from them



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learned that in a country then almost unknown to the general world there existed a fertile region in the north of California; one that but awaited the adding of the energy of man to that which a generous nature had already contributed.

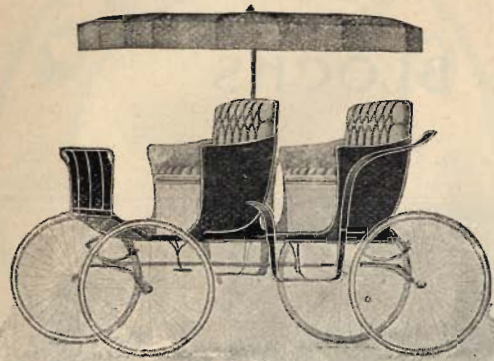
He procured a grant from the Mexican Governor of California that covered a number of leagues of land, but they were so indefinitely described that it was not until 1866 that the courts of our country finally determined the status. He landed with his men at about the foot of I street, as it now is in this city, on August 16, 1839, and immediately commenced the construction of his Fort. It was built of adobe and on its walls were mounted ship-cannon, formidable in those days, but that now would be but a jeer. He reduced the Indians to subjection and taught them agriculture and manufacturing. It was on the site of the City of Sacramento that he planted his wheat field—the first in the Sacramento Valley; here it was that he planted grapevines and fruit trees. At the Fort he established various lines of manufactures. His foresight was indeed, wonderful. So far back as the very early forties he recognized the value of the water power of the swift-flowing American River and constructed at Brighton a saw-mill to be run by the harnessed waters of that stream. There was for a time an era of prosperity; he was indeed the master of all that he surveyed and one able to hold his own with the governmental authority—Mexico; to trade with and acquire the Russian possessions in Sonoma County; he maintained absolute dominion over the native tribes.

An incident occurred in 1846, that had much to do with the acquisition of California by the United States. It was what is commonly known as the Bear Flag Revolution. At that time the northern portion of California was but sparsely settled by Americans. There was jealousy by the Mexican Government of their incoming, and the direct threat was made that they would be driven from the country. Sutter's Fort was the rallying point of these men, and from thence the members of the Bear Flag party proceeded to the then fortified town of Sonoma, captured it and raised the flag of the "Republic of California"—the famous Bear flag. That

crude and improvised banner floated but a short time; the Stars and Stripes took its place and heralded the acquisition of this territory by our Government.

Another incident occurred in January, 1843, that was a marker in the history of the civilized world. Sutter had sent James W. Marshall, with a party of men, to construct a saw mill at Coloma, in what is now the County of El Dorado. It was in the tail race of that saw mill that Marshall picked up the golden talisman that was destined to electrify the world, and to bring to our shores the picked men of every nation. It was the magnet that attracted to California the pioneers who adventured by sea and by land in the argonautic days to the land of the golden fleece. It was in Sutter's Fort that Marshall brought this precious nugget; there it was tested and its integrity established. The discovery of gold, however, wrought the ruin of the generous old Captain. A new population sprang up, and in a few years he was stripped of his great landed possessions, his Fort fell into decay, and it was only a few years ago when nothing remained except the ruins of the inside building. Think, indeed, that for many years that building was used for the raising of chickens? But there came a change. The Native Sons of the Golden West raised a fund for the restoration of the old Fort, and it is due to them that to-day its inclosing walls, as well as the interior, bear the semblance of the early days of their history.

It is not generally known what part that grim old fort played in the history of nations. Between the lines there can be seen the hands of Russia, France, England, Mexico and the United States. While Sutter became a naturalized citizen of Mexico he was a thorough republican and ever favored the United States. Had it not been for the establishment of this fort, there is no question but that the soil of California would be now covered by the flag of England, and again, had it not been for the output of the gold of California that strengthened our Government during the Civil War in all probability the Confederacy of our States would have been shattered. Some years ago, and when the internal building of the fort stood solitary on the mound, a sorry reminder of "the days of old, the days of gold, and the days of forty-nine," General L. H. Foote wrote of it this very pretty piece of poetry:



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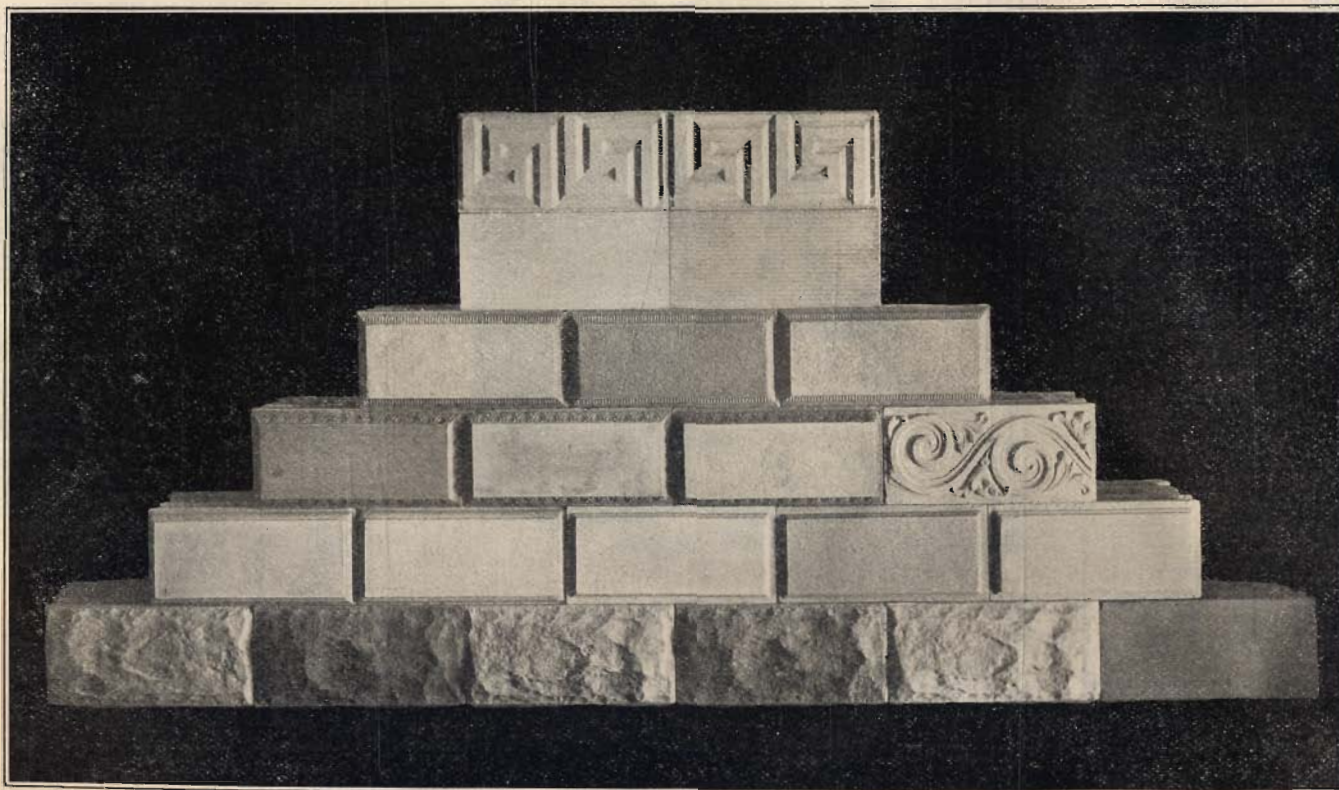
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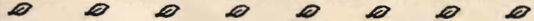
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I stood by the old fort's crumbling wall,
On the eastern verge of the town;
The sun, through clefts in the ruined hall,
Flecked with its light the rafters brown.
And sitting with gold the oaken floor,
Seemed to burnish the place anew;
While out and in through the half-closed door,
Building their nests, the swallows flew.
Charmed by the magic spell of the place,
The present vanished, the past returned;
While rampart and fortress filled the space,
And yonder the Indian campfires burned.
I heard the sentinel's measured tread,
The challenge prompt the quick reply;
And there on the tower above my head,
The Mexican banner flaunts the sky.

Borne to my ear on the ambient air,
Mingled with sounds of childish glee.
I heard again the low hum of care,
Like the restless moan of the sea.

Around me were waifs of every clime—
Blown by the fickle winds of chance;
Knight-errants, ready at any time,
For any cause, to couch a lance.
The stanch old Captain, with courtly grace,
Owner of countless leagues of land,
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On miles of meadow his cattle feed,
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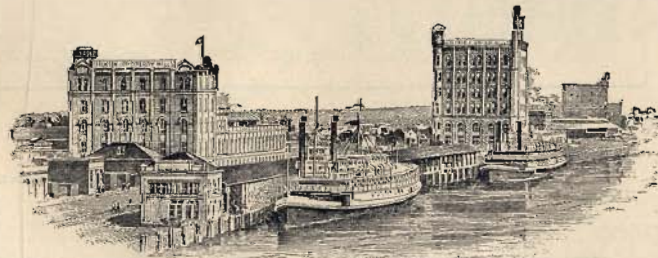
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