



Oregon Historical Society

1870

Publishers Plant Site — Oregon city

1870

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Anthony Zellerbach had arrived in San Francisco penniless two years before — in 1868 — after unsuccessfully trying to make his fortune in the gold fields of the Sierra Nevada. Probably because it required very

little capital, he soon drifted into peddling paper, “carrying samples over his arm to submit to the trade.” San Francisco’s bonanza days, when a bucket of water cost \$1 and whisky sold for \$40 a quart, were over and the going was tough for a middle-aged immigrant from Bavaria with a wife and two sons to support. Working out of a 15-foot-square room at 217 Front Street, Anthony called on his customers from dawn to dusk, striving to weave his fortunes into those of the growing city.

San Francisco was the fastest-growing city in the West, and probably in the world. When gold was discovered at Sutter’s Mill in 1848 it was a town of about 1,000 people and 200 buildings, of which many were adobe huts built by the Mexican settlers. Two years later San Francisco contained nearly 25,000 people, and within a decade the number of residents had doubled. Partly this was due to the successful conclusion of President Polk’s war against Mexico, which resulted in statehood for California in 1850. But mostly it was due to gold.

Gold provided the driving force that transformed the West from a hives and barter economy into a vigorous facsimile of the industrial East. But it was only a facsimile. In economic terms the West was a vacuum: it needed to import an infinity of basic products around the Horn, across Panama, or over the Oregon Trail to supply its people and sustain its growth.

(Top) Daguerreotype of California gold miners at Grizzly Flats in the Sierra Nevada mountains.

(Top Right) Hydraulic mining, Malakoff diggings near Nevada City, where Zellerbachs operated.

(Bottom Right) Sacramento St. San Francisco 1865.



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