

# Words That Won the West

1830-1850

By RAY ALLEN BILLINGTON

FOUNDATION FOR  
PUBLIC RELATIONS RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

IF WE PAUSE for a backward glance, we shall discover that public relations boasts a vivid past. Ever since the beginning of history, the movers and shakers of the world have recognized the importance of opinion and have studied the ways of influencing it.

Taken as a whole, this past would be worth exploring, if for no other reason than to satisfy the curiosity that modern man commonly holds about his antecedents.

It is our hope, however, that the present series of historical papers will do more than satisfy the curious—that they will both instruct and inspire all of those who today practice the ancient art of public relations.

MILTON FAIRMAN

*President of the Foundation for Public Relations  
Research and Education*

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AN ADDRESS before the Conference of  
the Public Relations Society of America by  
RAY ALLEN BILLINGTON

*Fairmont Hotel, November 18, 1963  
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## ABOUT THE FOUNDATION

The Foundation for Public Relations Research and Education was established in 1956. Operating in a broad field, the Foundation's purposes include the promotion or sponsorship of research, instruction and study in public relations; the provision of fellowships, scholarships, grants or other facilities or opportunities to meet these objectives; and the general dissemination of information about public relations.

The Lecture presented in this publication is one of several projects sponsored by the Foundation. Another representative project is the Foundation Fellowships, inaugurated in 1959, which enables teachers of public relations to acquire practical experience in the field.

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## ABOUT THE LECTURE

This third Foundation Lecture was presented as an address by Dr. Ray Allen Billington at the national conference of the Public Relations Society of America in San Francisco, California, on November 18, 1963.

Dr. Billington was born in Bay City, Michigan, in 1903. Reared in Detroit, he was educated at the University of Wisconsin (Ph.B., 1926), the University of Michigan (M.A., 1927) and Harvard University (Ph.D., 1933).

He taught at Clark University and Smith College before going to Northwestern University where he held the William Smith Mason chair of History from 1944 to 1963. In 1963, he became Senior Research Associate at the Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

In 1953-54, Dr. Billington served as Harold Vyvyan Harmsworth Professor of History at Oxford University. He holds honorary degrees from Oxford (M.A.), Bowling Green State University (Litt.D.) and Park College (LL.D.). He has served as president of three of the major historical societies: the American Studies Association (1959-61), the Mississippi Valley Historical Association (1962-63) and the Western History Association (1961-63).

Dr. Billington is the author of numerous books and articles on western history, including *Western Expansion: A History of the American Frontier* (2nd edition, 1960); *The Far Western Frontier, 1830-1860* (1956); and *The Westward Movement in the United States* (1959). He is also the editor of an 18-volume series, *The Histories of the American Frontier*, being published by Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.

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# Words That Won the West

1830-1850

WHAT Frank Lloyd Wright once puckishly called the "great westward tilt" that was sliding half the nation's population into California is the most persistent phenomenon in American history. For three centuries our population has been drifting westward at an ever-accelerating rate. All Manhattan Island would have to be emptied to provide the men, women, and children who have moved beyond the Rockies in the past decade alone, and today those western states are growing at a rate forty per cent faster than the rest of the nation. Pessimists who bemoan the vanishing orange groves, thickening smog, and mounting taxes needed to provide schools and freeways for the incoming hordes, and optimists who detect in the lowering age curve evidence that the West will some day wrest technological and cultural leadership from the East, are alike contributing to the influx, even though unwittingly and sometimes unwillingly.

For residence in the West seemingly infects humans with an irresistible compulsion to boast of their good fortune, and their tempting word pictures of life in an Eden of eternal sunshine serve as magnets that lure more and more migrants toward the Pacific. From that sixteenth-century day when Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo, sailing northward from Mexico to claim the coast for Spain, called the land California because it reminded him of a mythical island "at the right hand of the Indies, very close to the Terrestrial Paradise," every Westerner has been a self-appointed public relations expert, busily advertising the beauties and comforts of this Garden of the World.

That these attitudes should prevail in this modern age of promotion and the "fast sell" is understandable; that they were just as apparent among the first Anglo-American pioneers to reach the Pacific Slope is less well known. Yet the migrations that peopled California and the Oregon country in the 1840's were induced not only by the usual impulses governing folk movements—hope of gain, thirst for adventure, a desire to escape an uncongenial homeland—but by one of the most effective promotional campaigns in history.

When that decade dawned, conditions in the Mississippi Valley were hardly those that normally stimulate emigration. Good land could still be had there at the government price of \$1.25 an acre; Louisiana, Arkansas, and Missouri were relatively new states, while much of Illinois, Wisconsin, and Iowa was still unpeopled, and Minnesota awaited its first occupants. Beyond the tier of states bordering the Mississippi lay a "Permanent Indian Frontier" of reservations stretching from the Missouri to the Red rivers, and beyond this what was believed to be the "Great American Desert" of barren wastelands forever unsuitable to human habitation. These obstacles would surely discourage migration, but so would economic conditions in the Valley. There the great depression that followed the Panic of 1837 impoverished the people; prices were so low that farmers let corn rot in the field and steamboat captains burned slabs of bacon rather than more expensive wood and coal. Any prophet surveying this scene in 1840, and knowing that hard times always immobilized American frontiersmen, would have predicted that the westward surge would not be resumed for at least a decade.

Yet during the next ten years nearly 100,000 Americans made their way to the Pacific's shores, and California (which had been a Mexican province in 1840) and the Oregon country (which had been jointly held with England) had become part of the United States. This miracle was the product of many forces, not the least of which was an effective public relations campaign which revealed how well its proponents gauged the popular psychology. Their appeals to the acquisitive instinct, to man's persistent urge for comfort and health, and to the humanitarianism and patriotism that are ever-present traits among Americans, overcame seemingly insurmountable obstacles and won the West for the United States.

Responsible for launching this campaign was the handful of settlers who reached the Pacific Coast in the 1820's and 1830's. Some were New England merchants bent on trading Yankee gimcracks for the hide and tallow produced on California's wide-spreading ranchos; their agents settled at coastal towns, married dark-eyed señoritas, and began publicizing their good fortune with every dispatch to the "States." Others were sailors on the vessels that regularly touched there; Richard Henry Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* was a classic example of this type of promotional literature. More important were two ambitious land-owners, John Marsh and John A. Sutter. Marsh, who reached California in 1836 carrying only his Harvard diploma, the works of Thomas Paine, the *Lives of the Poets*, a Bible, and a hymnal, established himself on a 50,000 acre ranch at Mount Diablo in the lower San Joaquin Valley. Sutter, a Swiss adventurer, arrived a short time later and similarly persuaded the Mexican officials to grant him a giant principality at the site of modern Sacramento. Both men were eager to attract settlers to their unpeopled acres; both wrote endless letters to eastern newspapers that glorified the delights of California life and even detailed travel routes from the Mississippi Valley to Mount Diablo and Sutter's Fort.

Oregon's self-appointed promoters differed in nature if not in purpose, for while California was advertised by merchants and land-owners, the Oregon country's most effective persuaders were a band of missionaries and a dedicated zealot. The zealot was Hall Jackson Kelley, a Massachusetts school teacher who made the American occupation of the Pacific Northwest his personal crusade. Having learned what he could of the country by reading, he petitioned Congress for land to found a colony there, formed "The American Society for Encouraging the Settlement of the Oregon Territory," produced a whole series of books and pamphlets glorifying the country, and besieged newspapers with letters urging its settlement.

The spark that touched off the missionary invasion was the visit of four Flathead and Nez Perce Indians to St. Louis in 1831. They made their long journey out of curiosity, but the story soon spread that these "Wise Men from the West" had come to seek the white man's Book of Heaven. This was enough to launch plans for a half-dozen

projects to enlighten the spiritually starved red man. First in the field was the Reverend Jason Lee and a party of Methodist exhorters who made the journey westward in 1834. With an eye to the practical, they built their mission in the Willamette Valley, where Indians were few but living conditions comfortable. Others who followed took their spiritual responsibilities more seriously, but Jason Lee outshone all in his determination to become a harbinger of American Civilization. His glowing letters to religious magazines and newspapers, all describing Oregon as a farmers' paradise, were read by tens of thousands. In 1838 he made a speaking tour through the East, exhibiting five half-breed Indian youths, and preaching the gospel of the Willamette Valley no less passionately than he did the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The results of this campaign — by Marsh and Sutter in California, and by Kelley and Lee in Oregon — were far-reaching. By 1840 information on the West was available to any Easterner who could read or listen. Books by travelers were multiplying. Politicians such as John Floyd and Thomas Hart Benton were lifting their voices for expansion, and their congressional speeches were widely reprinted. Magazines such as the *Whig Review* and *Hunt's Merchant's Magazine* were openly boosting the West, as were newspapers such as the New York *Sun*, the New York *Herald*, the New York *Journal of Commerce*, and the Boston *Advertiser*. Guidebooks, usually compiled by hack writers whose bubbling enthusiasm compensated for their complete lack of knowledge, were soon to begin misleading the travelers on their long journey westward. As this shower of words descended on the East, an image of the Far West began to take shape in the minds of Americans that was as compelling as it was attractive.

This image demonstrated that the persuaders possessed a surprising understanding of human motivation, for they stressed four themes that will be recognized by public relations experts as effective today, just as they were in the 1840's. Move to California or Oregon, they cried, to gain wealth in undreamed-of quantities, health and longevity, an opportunity to better the lot of an oppressed segment of humanity, and a chance to benefit the United States. Wealth, health, humanitarianism and patriotism — these are fundamental to the American way of life, and any public relations campaign built on all four appeals could not possibly fail.

Greatest stress, quite properly, was placed on the promise of material gain. That land was available in limitless quantities was emphasized by all writers, even though the United States owned not an inch of California or Oregon. They pointed out that a bill to allow every American settler in Oregon 640 acres, with lesser amounts for dependents, had been introduced in the Senate, and would undoubtedly pass once the question of ownership was settled with Great Britain. This was good enough for those with the itch to migrate. "Out in Oregon," one Missourian told his family, "I can get me a square mile of land. And a quarter section for each of you all. Dad burn me, I am done with this country." California offered even brighter prospects, for a year's residence made newcomers with sufficient influence eligible for a government grant of eleven square leagues of land in the interior. These were tempting prospects to depression-ridden farmers in the East where government land sold for \$1.25 an acre and better sites for three times that sum.

And what land that was in the Willamette and Sacramento valleys! "In no country in the world," promised the author of one guide book, "may the husbandman look forward with more assurance to the reward of his toil." The rich alluvial soils, vowed the persuaders, produced beets three feet in diameter, turnips five feet in circumference, oats eight feet tall with stalks as thick as walking sticks, and wheat with seven heads to the stalk, each as large as an ordinary head in the East. Farmers were told that yields of seventy bushels of wheat to the acre were common, and 120 bushels not unusual. "They do say, gentlemen," one speaker assured a crowd in a Missouri town, "they do say that out in Oregon the pigs are running about under the great acorn trees, round and fat, and already cooked, with knives and forks sticking in them so that you can cut off a slice whenever you are hungry."

This abundance was certain, year after year, because the balmy climate precluded both frost and drought. Oregon's Willamette Valley was pictured as a land of "perpetual spring," where the "sky is always clear, and on the plains a gentle breeze is generally blowing from the sea." There "rain seldom falls, even in the winter season; but the dews are sufficiently heavy to compensate for its absence." If Oregon justified such praise, California inspired even more outlandish superlatives, as

it has from that day to this. Richard Henry Dana found the coastal climate "the best in the world," so warm that fires were never necessary save for cooking. "If man were to ask of God a climate," added another enraptured author, "he would ask just such an one as that of California." Reading these rhapsodic words, one Easterner gained the impression that the land was scarcely inferior "to the Eden described in the history of creation, and presenting such fascinations as almost to call the angels and saints from their blissful gardens and diamond temples in the heavens." Comfort and affluence were tempting prospects to poverty stricken farmers, shivering in the bleak log cabins of the Mississippi Valley frontier.

No less alluring was the promise of robust health for all who migrated. Illness made life miserable for Mississippi Valley pioneers, who had to endure both the diseases of civilization and a few that were unique to the frontier. Among these, none was more universal than the ague, or malaria as we would call it today. Mosquitoes carried this pestilence from community to community until none escaped; chills and fever were believed part of frontier life, like hard work. Housewives learned to hurry through their work before sitting down to wait the daily attack; ministers scheduled their sermons for times when they would not have the shakes; judges adjusted their dockets to coincide with periods when lawyers and criminals would not be ill; and even sparkling swains arranged to call on their intendeds when neither would tremble with the chills. There was no escaping. "Cure it?" answered an Illinois farmer when asked if the ague could be treated. "No, madam. No cure for it; you have to wear it out."

To pioneers thus afflicted, tales of an ague-free land in the West were irresistible. This the persuaders realized, and not one but stressed the health-giving qualities of the dry western air. Often repeated was the account of Antoine Robideaux, a fur trapper who visited the Missouri settlements in 1840 to tell his enraptured hearers that "there was but one man in California who ever had a chill there, and that it was a matter of such wonderment that the people of Monterey went eighteen miles into the country to see him shake." "Cases of remittent fevers," added Lansford Hastings in one of the most popular guide books, "have scarcely ever been known, in any portion of this country."

A land free from the ague seemed capable of any miracles to Mississippi Valley frontiersmen, and Californians seized on this opportunity to embroider their tales slightly beyond the point of credibility. One assured his readers that death was a "remarkable event" in San Diego, and that doctors who depended on their practice alone would starve. Another recounted the sad fate of a Californian who at the age of 250 had grown tired of life. Knowing that he could never die there, he made his will and left the region to await the end. This came soon enough, but no sooner had his body been taken back for burial than "the energies of life were immediately restored to his inanimate corpse! Herculean strength was imparted to his frame, and bursting the prison-walls of death, he appeared before his chapfallen heir reinvested with all the vigor and beauty of early manhood." Convinced at last, he was still living, satisfied that California was as pleasant a place to spend eternity as heaven itself.

Propagandists who preached this message struck a responsive chord, for ill-health is more universally dreaded than poverty or loneliness. Wrote one observer of the migrations of the 1840's: "They emigrate to the Pacific in search of health, and if they can find this and a reasonable fertility of soil on their arrival, they will not only be satisfied but feel thankful to Providence for providing them with such a retreat from the miseries they have endured." The editor of *Niles' Weekly* echoed these beliefs when he noted in 1846 that "the severe and general illness of the last season has been the moving cause of much of this migration."

The desire for self-improvement — economically and physically — is basic in human motivation, but something more was needed to inspire the mass migrations of the 1840's. Throughout history idealism has determined behavior almost as frequently as materialism. This the California and Oregon boosters recognized, and their campaigns were directed to proving that migration would benefit two depressed segments of humanity: the anarchy-ridden peons of Mexico and the despot-governed slaves of British America. "I look," wrote one prospective emigrant after feasting on their diet of words, "upon the colonization of Oregon as a noble enterprise. I think a good man could do no more acceptable service to himself, his country, and the cause

of humanity, than to assist and aid in the settlement of that country." There spoke a man who had been moved by one of the most effective public relations campaigns in the history of American expansion.

This began early in the nineteenth century, but did not reach a crescendo until the 1840's when the spirit of "Manifest Destiny" flamed across the land. America's God-given fate, preached proponents of this heady doctrine, was to encompass all the continent — and beyond. "Its floor shall be the hemisphere," exulted the editor of the *Democratic Review*, "its roof the firmament of the star-studded heavens, and its congregation an Union of many Republics, comprising hundreds of happy millions, owning no man master, but governed by God's natural and moral law of equality." There was nothing selfish or imperialistic in this attitude. Pioneers bound for California and Oregon carried with them the priceless gifts of freedom and democracy; they came as crusaders to release the slaves of tyranny from bondage and endow them with the blessings of that most perfect instrument of government ever devised: the American constitution. One Oregon guide book referred to the pioneers as "benefactors of their race — the founders of a new, enlightened and powerful state." Another saw the emigrants as heralds of a new day when "the supreme darkness of ignorance, superstition, and despotism which now so entirely pervade many portions of those remote regions" would forever vanish. He looked forward to the time when "the blazing light of civil and religious liberty; when genuine *republicanism*, and unsophisticated *democracy*, shall be reared up, and tower aloft, even upon the now wild shores of the great Pacific."

These were pulse-tingling phrases. The farm boy who embarked on the California adventure was more than a mere seeker after wealth; he was a white knight riding forth in the service of humanity. The amateur public relations experts who spread the message of "Manifest Destiny" across the land recognized that the American people will respond to the call of the needy, the distressed, and the oppressed as to no other. From the day when starry-eyed citizens rushed to the aid of French and Greek revolutionists, down to the present when they generously empty their pockets to aid earthquake victims or underdeveloped countries, humanitarianism has been a basic motivating force in human

behavior. It played no insignificant role in sending emigrants across the plains in the 1840's.

No less instinctive to the people of the United States is a devout patriotism that impells them to resist any threat to their nation's sovereignty. This impulse could also be utilized by the persuaders of the 1840's. Rumors persisted that England and France were determined to occupy California to satisfy debts owed their nationals by the Mexican government. Oregon was jointly held with Britain, and would fall to the country that sent the most colonists there. Here was a made-to-order opportunity to strike a dual blow for country and mankind by flinging the nation's borders to the Pacific and ousting these absolutist European intruders from the land of freedom.

These arguments were applied especially to California, for Americans were calmly confident that their most potent weapon — the irresistible urge of pioneers to move westward — would win Oregon. Writers set out to show that this fair land was occupied by backward near-savages who were as ill-equipped to govern their domains as they were ill-prepared to defend them against attack. Mexican-Californians were painted in letter after letter from the West as "a lazy, indolent and cowardly people," devoid of enterprise, and destined like the Indians to "yield to the swelling tide of Anglo-Saxon adventure." Of intelligence they had little, one traveler maintained, and this was used chiefly "in directing their choice of shade trees, under which they shall spend the day in sloth, or in stealing a bullock's hide, on which to throw their lazy carcasses at night." Their government was "little more than a despotism, or rather a complicated machine for the oppression of the people." Sighed one American as he surveyed sparsely settled California: "In the hands of an enterprising people, what a country this might be."

Its conquest would be ridiculously easy, if the propagandists could be believed. "Never in a single instance," wrote one, "... have the California troops been so wanting in courage to fire on an enemy, unless he was in a helpless condition, nor so wanting in discretion as to wait to be fired at, when there was a chance to run away in safety." The Mexican soldiery, another added, were held in contempt by the settlers who "assert that five Indians will chase twenty Mexicans, and

five Anglo-Americans will chase twenty Indians." Would-be immigrants who read these nationalistic distortions convinced themselves that by migrating they would help save this land for civilization before England and France planted their flags on the nation's doorstep. A mere journey westward would assure perpetual wealth and health, would bring the despotic peons of Mexico the blessings of the world's most perfect government, and would frustrate the grasping designs of Europe's imperialistic monarchies.

The result was inevitable. Through the early 1840's the "Oregon Fever" and the "California Fever" raged throughout the Mississippi Valley. Beginning in 1841 the first great caravans of covered wagons began the trek westward toward Jason Lee's mission in the Willamette Valley or Sutter's Fort on the Sacramento. There they accomplished their manifestly destined mission with unpredictable ease. Their presence in Oregon so terrified the Hudson's Bay Company officials that Fort Vancouver was abandoned as headquarters, allowing the British government to cede over the whole region north to the 49th parallel. In California the rough-and-tumble pioneers helped foment the Bear Flag Revolt, which would have separated that land from Mexico had it not merged with a larger conflict. The Mexican War, made inevitable by mounting tension between the two nations, ended in 1848 with not only California but all the Southwest in the hands of the United States.

This princely domain was but precariously held, for it had been won by a pitifully small handful of pioneers; only about 6,000 had reached Oregon by the mid-1840's and less than 1,000 had endured the hardships of the California trail. Before the decade ended these early migrations were dwarfed by one of the most dramatic movements of people in history, as the rush of the Forty-Niners added nearly 100,000 Americans to California's population almost overnight. This influx, like those before it, admirably illustrates that the West was won by words as well as bullets.

The chronology of events is important to one who would appraise the part played by self-appointed public relations experts in stimulating the California rush. Gold was discovered in the Sierra foot-

hills on January 24, 1848. The find created almost no excitement; not until two months later did a San Francisco newspaper mention the subject, and a few prospectors begin to drift away to the mines. As late as the end of April another San Francisco editor mirrored opinion when he branded the rumors of wealth as "as fantastic a take-in as was ever got up to guzzle the gullible." Westerners had fallen for too many contrived gold discoveries before to be fooled by this hoax.

Then, early in May, the mines were visited by Sam Brannan, a Mormon landowner and merchant, who operated a store near Sutter's Fort and planned to open a new one at Soloma. Any major rush would stimulate business in these establishments. This may have been in Sam Brannan's mind when, on May 12, he returned to San Francisco and at once went running through the streets, holding aloft a quinine bottle filled with dust, waving his hat, and shouting: "Gold! Gold! Gold from the American River."

This single event suddenly set California afire. San Francisco went mad overnight as men squandered their savings for pickaxes and spades, bowls and washing pans, and headed for the new Eldorado. Within days the city was deserted, save for the old, the halt, and the lame. "The blacksmith has dropped his hammer," recorded one observer, "the carpenter his plane, the mason his trowl, the farmer his sickle, the baker his loaf, the tapster his bottle. All are off to the mines, some on horses, some on carts, and some on crutches." Within weeks the infection had spread to other communities, and in each the story was the same. "The whole country," wrote the editor of one newspaper as he prepared to suspend publication because his printers had deserted, ". . . resounds with the sordid cry of 'gold, GOLD, GOLD!' while the field is left half planted, the house half built, and everything neglected but the manufacture of shovels and pickaxes."

Amidst all this hoopla and excitement, the East remained coldly indifferent. No eastern newspaper mentioned the discovery until August 19, 1848, seven months after it took place. From that time on letters or dispatches appeared at infrequent intervals in the New York, Philadelphia, and New Orleans press. These mirrored the growing enthusiasm within California; one boasted that "your streams have

minnows in them, but ours are paved with gold," while another testified that miners were roaming about at will, stuffing their pockets with dust and nuggets. Here were the ingredients for a bad case of gold fever, yet scarcely a stir of interest rippled the eastern calm. Too many promoters eager to sell land, too many merchants anxious to dispose of shoddy merchandise, too many editors seeking increased circulation, had tried to start rushes in the past for these tales to be believed.

Within California Sam Brannan had vanquished this lethargy; in the East President James K. Polk was to play the same role and with similar devices. Polk, recognizing the unpopularity of the Mexican War in the North, realized that he could recapture popular favor by demonstrating the value of the lands wrested from Mexico. He chose his annual message of December 5, 1848 — eleven months after the discovery — for this revelation. "The accounts of the abundance of gold in that territory," he told Congress and the nation, "are of such an extraordinary character as would scarcely command belief were they not corroborated by the authentic reports of officers in the public service." Eight of these "reports" accompanied the President's message, and were soon spread across the nation's front pages. One, prepared by the military governor of California, told of two men who took \$17,000 in gold from a small gully, of a ravine that yielded \$12,000 in dust. "No capital is required to obtain this gold," the governor testified, "as the laboring man wants nothing but his pick and shovel and tin pan, with which to dig out and wash the gravel; and many frequently pick gold out of the crevices of rock with their butcher knives, in pieces of from one to six ounces.

Skeptics who had refused to believe the newspaper editors could not doubt the authority of the President of the United States. Those who still questioned were converted two days later when a courier arrived carrying a tea caddy packed with 230 ounces of dust and flakes. These were assayed at the Philadelphia mint, which reported in highly unscientific language that they were "gold — genuine gold — singularly rich gold." The tea caddy, displayed for all to see at the War Office, touched off a national hysteria, just as Sam Brannan's quinine bottle of dust had touched off a local hysteria in California eight months before.

The newspapers, throwing all caution to the winds, leaped on the bandwagon with pulse-quickenning phrases: "The Eldorado of the old Spaniards is discovered at last;" "Now have the dreams of Cortez and Pizarro been realized;" "We are on the brink of the Age of Gold." Merchants closed their doors; ministers preached sermons on the need for Sabbath observance in the mines. All was hurrah and excitement as men everywhere prepared for the trek to that golden land of promise. "The coming of the Messiah or the dawn of the Millennium," reported one newspaper, "would not have excited anything like the interest" created by President Polk's message and the golden tea caddy.

Here was opportunity made to order for self-appointed promoters, for only a handful of the wealthy could depart at once by sea, while the great army that would follow the overland trails in the spring was eager to hear or read any message that quickened anticipation. Newspapers filled their columns with accounts of fabulous discoveries; lecturers sprang up by the scores to assure audiences only slightly less informed than themselves that the California soil was so rich that every handful contained a half-ounce of gold, or that a hundred thousand men could not exhaust the wealth in a dozen years. Some thirty guide books were published that winter, most of them pieced together from travelers' accounts and the fevered imagination of the authors. Here was a diet as rich in fantasy as the tales of Baron Munchausen.

A favored topic with these authors was the wealth amassed by miners already in the diggings. One described a stream where the water ran over pure gold for several yards; another told of extracting \$27,000 from a gulch a hundred yards long. Mexicans were reported to visit the mines for a week end, returning on Monday with a fortune that would allow them to live in affluence for the rest of their days. Indians, it was said, threw away their arrows and filled their quivers with dust; one traded a nugget as large as his head for a red sash. A guide-book author told of being called by his partner as they were prospecting a stream. "He was holding in his hand a piece of gold, about as large and thick as my double hands outspread; while with a quiet, determined air, he pointed to a bed he had cleared away, where gleamed the richest treasure the world ever saw! The flake which, with his small pickaxe, he had peeled off, was as nothing to those which, bedded in stone and

compact gravel, lay on each side of the ravine." Little wonder that one would-be miner left for California carrying only a nut-pick to pry nuggets from the rocks, or that another gathered a dozen burlap sacks and announced that he would stay until they were filled with dust even if it took until fall.

Such was the nation's mania that even the fantasies of the most imaginative tall-tale tellers were sometimes believed. One oft-repeated story dealt with a miner who had found a nugget weighing 839 pounds. Unable to move his treasure, and unwilling to leave it, he was last reported sitting on top, offering \$27,000 for a plate of pork and beans. Another recounted the experience of a miner who returned to the States with \$64,000. In his new state of affluence he started to throw away his tattered mining clothes, but his thrifty wife shook them out and obtained an additional \$23,000 in dust. Still another described a poker game in the mines where one man opened with a handful of dust, another raised a pint, a third a quart, and the fourth a gallon. The original opener, unable to meet this, turned to a friend and said: "Here, Jim, watch my pile while I go out and dig enough to call him."

These, then, were words that won the West. Some were sober truth, some pure fantasy, some deliberately designed to play on the emotions of their hearers, both base and noble. Viewed in retrospect, what lessons do they teach for those who today seek to sway the public mind? Five conclusions seem justified:

First: Man's ambitions are so complex that no single appeal is sufficient to alter his behavior. Instead motivation stimulus to be completely effective must cater to both the materialistic instincts and the idealism that all Americans share. Prospective California and Oregon immigrants were promised new wealth, freedom from illness, a chance to benefit mankind, and an opportunity to perform a service for their country. No one of these lures by itself would have been sufficient; together they set the tide of migration flowing westward.

Second: Regardless of the effectiveness of the techniques employed, the mass mind cannot be swayed until a favorable psychological atmosphere has been created. Hall Jackson Kelley preached the glories

of Oregon for two decades before his words began to fall on sympathetic ears. Californians remained indifferent to the discovery of gold for five months before the countryside caught fire. Easterners waited nearly a year, then suddenly caught the gold fever in a mass infection. These intervals suggest that the efforts of the isolated propagandists who carried on their lonely crusades were not wasted; they prepared the ground for the rich harvest that could only be reaped when the time was right.

Third: Man singly or in mass is wary of the professional persuader, but will believe the most improbable statements when they are uttered by someone whose integrity he respects. Few accepted the tales of California's wealth until the President of the United States placed his stamp of approval on them. Then, almost overnight, the whole nation caught fire with excitement.

Fourth: Visible evidence has greater appeal than the most vivid descriptions. Californians remained indifferent to stories of wealth from the mines until Sam Brannan waved his dust-filled quinine bottle for all to see. The last eastern skeptics were converted when the golden tea caddy was placed on display in Washington.

Fifth: Exaggeration, carried to the point of fantasy, has wide appeal if presented with tongue-in-cheek humor. Not even the most gullible could believe that Oregon hogs ran about already cooked, or that Californians had to leave their healthy climate to die, or that a miner could sit for sixty-seven days on an 839 pound nugget and offer fantastic sums for pork and beans. Yet these were the tall tales that were reprinted everywhere, and remembered. They did as much to advertise the West, and with less effort by their originators, than the most unromantically accurate statements.

Whatever the lessons that can be drawn from the public relations campaigns of the 1840's, there can be no question of their effectiveness. The army of promoters, speculators, travelers, newspaper and magazine editors, guide-book writers, and expansionist politicians who labored to lure pioneers westward played a significant, if sometimes forgotten, role in history. That they labored not in vain was attested by the monument they left behind: a nation that stretched from sea to sea. Here indeed was proof of the effectiveness of the words that won the West.