

### “49ers”

*I left the fields unplanted, set out on my own; left my wife and family and went thousands of miles from home.*

*I took a three-month trip on a clipper ship, around the tip of South America to California, Where the rivers and the streams flow with golden dreams, down the Sierra Nevada.*

*They came from Australia, China, and Peru and all across America when they heard the news.*

*They walked across plains and the Rocky Mountain pass. Who knows how long this gold is gonna last?*

*And on the Sacramento River I staked my claim, as hundreds of thousands of others did the same.*

*All day and night, sifting through the pan, up and down the mountain digging up the land.*

*And for months I worked the rivers and the mines and never found an ounce of gold in all that time.*

*Now every night I'm sleepin' under California stars, dreamin' of cashin' in them big gold bars.*

*They called us 49ers, but by then it was too late; if you wanted any gold you had to be there by '48.*

#### **Historical Background:**

In the same year that the United States acquired California from Mexico through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, gold was discovered in the American River, just north of Sacramento. Throughout the rest of 1848, and into the early months of 1849, gold was abundant, and many people became wealthy, virtually overnight. Word of the easy riches to be found in California spread quickly; not just in the United States, but around the world. In less than a year, San Francisco was transformed from a small port town to a large, sprawling city, as tens of thousands of fortune seekers flooded the area from all around the globe.

The majority of Americans who migrated to California from east of the Mississippi came by sea: A speedy clipper ship around the tip of South America; or, the less expensive option—a ship to Central America, a trek through the jungles of the isthmus of Panama, and back north through the Pacific to San Francisco Bay.

Most of the fortune seekers that arrived in California by mid-1849 and after were severely disappointed. Many sacrificed their life savings to pay for the trip and came up empty. 1848 was the year to get rich quick: By '49, the large gold strikes that created the rush were uncommon. The gold rush did accomplish a huge population boom in California, but once again the issue of slavery in new western states intensified the animosity between the North and the South. After a year-long, heated debate, California entered the Union as a free state under the Compromise of 1850.

