



## SCHOOL STATION

### I. GOAL:

Students will learn about the early development of education in California and the Sacramento area through the study of what schooling might have been like at Sutter's Fort. They will recognize differences in schooling then and now.

### II. OBJECTIVES:

- A. Students will develop a personal sense of history as they participate in a recreated school day at Sutter's Fort in 1846.
- B. Students will use language and math skills while completing activities as directed by the teacher. Early school materials will be sampled.
- C. Students will follow the codes of discipline and courtesies with regards to gender as established by the teacher.
- D. Students will compare the curriculum and standards of behavior of early education with those of the present.
- E. Students will compare the goals of education then and now. Goals have gone from developing skills for living in a local community to developing skills for living in a global community using technology.

### III. THE PEOPLE:

There are records of teachers being present at Sutter's Fort. John Bidwell is perhaps the best known. He was a school teacher in Ohio and Iowa and an immigrant in the Bartleson Party. Captain Sutter employed him to be in charge of Fort Ross as well as Hock Farm, Sutter's home near present-day Marysville. John Bidwell did not teach at the Fort.

In the **New Helvetia Diary** in January 1846, Captain Sutter notes that "an attempt was made to make up a school for Mrs. Nash." However, no further mention is made in the diary, and there are no known records that tell who Mrs. Nash was. It is a single reference to that thought was ever given to establishing a formal school at Sutter's Fort.



Any teachers here were most likely former teachers who were eager to provide an education to children who were present at the time. It is possible that they may have brought a small number of teaching materials such as a reader, slate, slate pencil, and literature books. Teachers were not always certified. Often they were just someone who could read, a parent or relative teaching their own child. Lessons might be informal, short, and sporadic. Activities at the Fort were a distraction and there were always more important chores to attend to for both parents and children; and there was the ever present yearning to move on to a permanent settlement.

#### **IV. THE PLACE:**

Teachers and students usually gathered wherever there was space: in their small quarters, along the Fort wall, under a tree, or by the warmth of an open fire. Early settlers were not convinced of the need for schools. Education was a luxury until the settlers became more established. They later recognized the importance of being able to read and write. Initially, girls were not thought to need an education as much as boys. Once communities became established, settlers began building schoolhouses. They were very spare, minimally furnished with a few tables and benches. Rooms were hot in the summer and cold in the winter. Sometimes they had dirt floors and paper windows.

#### **CALIFORNIA'S FIRST SCHOOLS:**

The first American school in California was established in December, 1846 on the Santa Clara Mission grounds by Mrs. Olive Mann Isbell, a member of one of the immigrant groups arriving overland that year. Using a dilapidated former stable, with boxes for seats, 25 children attended the First American School for two months.

In the same year a school was established in Monterey, but was soon abandoned. Other efforts were made from time to time to maintain schools, but little interest in them was shown by parents or children. It was very difficult to secure teachers who could interest the children or make attendance seem worthwhile.

In March, 1847, the Rev. Walter Colton in Monterey set about having prisoners quarry stone for a schoolhouse. Construction was completed in 1849 with the building becoming the Town Hall on the second floor and the school on the first floor. The building was named Colton Hall.

A schoolhouse built of redwood was completed in San Francisco in December, 1847, but lacked a teacher. The school finally opened in April, 1848 to six pupils and increased to 37. Due to the lure of the gold fields, attendance dropped to eight by May, when the teacher closed the school and departed for the mines.

Another school that fell victim to the Gold Rush was one started in Los Angeles in 1847.



## SACRAMENTO'S FIRST SCHOOL

C.T.H. Palmer, from Folsom, opened the first school in Sacramento and taught during August, 1849, but then abandoned the school. There were fewer than 10 students.

The Rev. J. A. Benton, former pastor of the Sixth Street Congregational Church, bought Mr. Palmer's furnishings and reopened the school in October, 1849. The school was located on "I" Street. It was constructed of rough clapboards and on the roof were old canvas ships' sails. The doorway was covered by a piece of canvas fastened at the top. There was an uneven dirt floor. The school opened with four students and never had more than 12. Because of severe weather, Rev. Benton was forced to close the school in December, 1849 and gave up teaching.

## CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

### SCHOOLYEAR

Some schools were seasonal and were closed when the crops were being planted or harvested. Children were needed to help with the labor. Even when schools were opened, attendance was often irregular.

### SCHOOLROOM

Schools had one room. Children from ages 6-18 years were all taught in the same room.

### TRANSPORTATION

Transportation to school was by wagon, horseback or foot.

### CHORES

Children were required to arrive early to perform chores. Water had to be pumped from wells into buckets for drinking water as well as for washing and fire prevention. The only source of heat might be a pot bellied stove in the center of the room. Wood had to be brought in and the fire had to be started before school started. The parents of each child were expected to bring in a load of wood each school year, or the child might be expelled.

### SUPPLIES

Supplies were minimal and had to be shared. Materials included slates, chalk, birch bark or coarse brown paper, charcoal and quill pens. Families made their own ink by soaking walnuts in water. Books were few and shared. The first reader was the Bible with a series like the McGuffey readers being used later.

### LEARNING

The basic method of learning was memorization through recitation, rhyming and riddles. Subjects included: reading, arithmetic (ciphering), spelling, penmanship, geography, manners and morals. Penmanship was considered more important than spelling. There was sewing for the girls.



## DISCIPLINE

Teachers were tough. The students were often tough as well, sometimes seriously threatening the teacher. The teacher could be as young as eighteen years of age, often the same age as some of the students, often younger. Teachers used extremely strict discipline measures. Corporal punishment was allowed. A whip was usually the instrument of discipline. Other forms of punishment were the dunce cap, stranding on a block or beatings with a ruler or paddle; not acceptable by today's standards.

## RULES

- Be punctual. Arrive at school on time.
- Respect your schoolteacher. Obey and accept all punishments.
- Sit up straight and pay attention at all times.
- Be silent during classes. Speak only when spoken to. Raise your hand if you need to speak. Never make noises or disturb your neighbors as they work.
- Do not leave your seat without permission.
- No more than one student at a time may go to the necessary.
- Do not call your classmates names or fight with them. Love and help each other.
- Bring firewood into the classroom when told to.
- Go quietly in and out of the classroom.
- If the teacher calls your name after class, you must stay to clean up and leave the schoolroom tidy.

## V. THE SCHOOL DAY

### MATERIALS

- McGuffey Readers
- Slates, chalk
- Quill pens, black ink, newsprint or lightweight brown paper
- Pencils
- Wooden Abacus for display
- Map of California Territory 1846
- Dunce cap

### OPENING

- Schoolmarm rings bell, tells students to line up
- Have boys and girls line up separately. Hand each student a name tag. Have them file into the schoolroom quietly. Boys and girls sit separately on opposite sides of the room.
- Introduce self.
- Review rules (see "Classroom Environment - Rules)
- Remind students to "make their manners" (i.e., girls curtsy, boys bow) when speaking to adults, especially the teacher. Students say the teacher's title and surname (i.e., Miss Jones).



## SUBJECTS

FIVE FINGER LESSON - Tell the children you are about to speak of the virtues that will bring them happiness all through their lives. You call it the 5-Finger Lesson not only because you use your fingers, but also because the ideas will always be at their fingertips.

- Recite the 5 values: Truthfulness, Honesty, Punctuality, Cleanliness, Kindness
- Students repeat the value after the teacher while touching a fingertip.
- Teacher explains each value:
  1. TRUTHFULNESS  
Speak the truth. There is no getting on without a love of the truth. Do not allow others to be mistaken about you. Do not be afraid of the consequences of telling the truth. If you have something to say, say the truth boldly. REMEMBER THAT!
  2. HONESTY  
To be honest is to be real. It is not to let the outside look smart when the inside is not so. If you do not work as hard as when no one is looking at you as you do when someone is looking at you, then you are dishonest.
  3. PUNCTUALITY  
Be on time. If you are late you will make others late. You must learn to be punctual. Lord Nelson, the great admiral said that always being five minutes early made him the great man he was.
  4. CLEANLINESS  
Be clean. Cleanliness is next to godliness. Always be fit to be seen. Your home should be clean and neat so that you never have to blush if someone comes in unexpectedly.
  5. KINDNESS  
You can change the worst character by being kind. Be firm in not giving up what you know is right, but be kind
- Have the children repeat the 5 values as a group until memorized.
- Have individuals recite the 5 values.

RECITATION – Reading aloud from McGuffey Reader

- Be sure that the selection is easy to read.
- Draw a line on the floor behind which students are to stand to read, if upstairs in the Central building use the seam between two planks.
- Direct each student to "toe the line," i.e., place toes behind the designated line before reading aloud. Assign 1-2 paragraphs.

COPY WORK

- Assign 1-2 paragraphs to copy in print or cursive. Misspellings are not acceptable.
- May use slates and chalk or quill pens and paper.



### CIPHERING (Arithmetic)

- Combine head work and written work using these problems:

1. Add:

By 2s from 4 – 50

By 4s from 1 – 53

By 3s from 1 – 43

By 5s from 1 – 61

By 3s from 6 – 51

By 6s from 0 – 72

2. Railroad Arithmetic:

$4+4+8+1+5+6+2=$

$10+2+3+1+5=$

$6+4+1+8+5+3=$

$6 \times 1 + 3 \times 3 - 7 + 4 =$

$4 \times 2 - 8 + 12 + 3 =$

$11 + 5 + 2 - 8 \times 4 =$

3. Story Problems:

- A boy paid \$3 for a pair of shoes and \$2 for a hat. How much did he pay for both items?
- Nine ducks were swimming on a pond. Five flew away. How many were left?
- A girl had a ribbon 5 yards long. She cut off a piece 2 yards long. How long was the piece that was left?
- If it takes 2 yards of cloth to make an apron, how many yards will it take to make four aprons?
- After selling 47 sheep, a farmer had 38 left. How many sheep did he have at first?
- A farmer had 32 cows. He bought 29 more. How many did he have then?
- In a school with 436 students, 169 are boys. How many are girls?
- There are 55 students in the first grade, 46 students in the second grade, and 37 students in the third grade. How many students are in all three grades?
- What is the cost of 3 cows if each one costs \$23?
- A boy had 48 marbles. He sold  $\frac{1}{4}$  of them. How many marbles did he sell? How many marbles did he have left?

### SPELLING

- Conduct a Spelling Bee using words from classroom lists.

### MUSIC

- Sing "Yankee Doodle"

### JOURNAL WRITING (use pencils)

Assign students to write in journals during non-active times while at the Fort. Journals should include:

- Description of events, including the people
- Expression of opinions, feelings, hopes, dreads, likes, dislikes
- Small sketches may be used after descriptions



### DISMISSAL

- Review Five Finger Lesson
- Remind students to mind their manners

## **VI. PRECAUTIONS:**

- A. Be aware of children who will not respond well to a 1840s teacher's stern demeanor, strong reprimands or punishment such as wearing the dunce cap. Make sure they realize it is just pretend.
- B. Quill writing requires close supervision to avoid messy ink spills.
- C. All students must be able to easily complete all activities. The lessons must match what they already know how to do. No new concepts should be introduced.
- D. Activities are samples to choose from. It is not likely that they can all be completed in your allotted time.