

# Eagle Theatre Teachers Aid



# Welcome to the Eagle Theatre

Held inside California's first Theater, this interpretive program explores the Gold Rush experience in Sacramento. The program includes a presentation on the life of 49ers and a video exploring the importance of entertainment in the Gold Rush-Era Sacramento, along with an interactive presentation on the theatre stage.

**MEET:** Eagle Theatre Located at 921 Front Street Old Sacramento. Please be on time. If you are running late you must call the Museum at 916-323-9280.

**COST:** \$75.00 payable by cash, check or credit card on line at [www.parks.ca.gov/railroadschoolprograms](http://www.parks.ca.gov/railroadschoolprograms)

Please fill out this form and bring it with you.

<b>Eagle Theatre Program</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>Grade:</b>
<b>Group/School Name</b>		
<b>Group/School email address</b>		
<b>Leader name</b>		
<b>Phone Number</b>		
<b>Amount of Adults</b>		
<b>Amount of Students</b>		

# Curriculum Standards Met by the Eagle Theatre Program

---

Taken from Fourth Grade in California Public Schools and the Common Core State Standards

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION October 2011

All specific standards can be found

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/cf/documents/glc4thgradecurriculum.pdf>

Taken from Fourth Grade in Public Schools and Common Core Standards

**4.3** Students explain the economic, social, and political life in California from the

establishment of the Bear Flag Republic through the Mexican-American War, the

Gold Rush, and the granting of statehood.

1. Identify the locations of Mexican settlements in California and those of other settlements, including Fort Ross and Sutter's Fort.

2. Compare how and why people traveled to California and the routes they traveled (e.g., James Beckwourth, John Bidwell, John C. Fremont, Pio Pico).

3. Analyze the effects of the Gold Rush on settlements, daily life, politics, and the physical environment (e.g., using biographies of John Sutter, Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, Louise Clapp).

4. Study the lives of women who helped build early California (e.g., Biddy Mason).

5. Discuss how California became a state and how its new government differed from those during the Spanish and Mexican periods.

**4.4** Students explain how California became an agricultural and industrial power,

tracing the transformation of the California economy and its political and cultural

development since the 1850s.

1. Understand the story and lasting influence of the Pony Express, Overland Mail Service, Western Union, and the building of the transcontinental railroad, including the contributions of Chinese workers to its construction.

2. Explain how the Gold Rush transformed the economy of California, including the

types of products produced and consumed, changes in towns (e.g., Sacramento, San Francisco), and economic conflicts between diverse groups of people.

Taken from Fifth Grade in California Public Schools and the Common Core State Standards

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION October 2011

**5.8.4** Discuss the experiences of settlers on the overland trails to Nature and Newcomers the West (e.g., location of the routes; purpose of the journeys; the influence of the terrain, rivers, vegetation, and climate; life in the territories at the end of these trails).

# Background Information and Building History

---

## **History of the Eagle Theatre**

The Eagle Theatre is a reconstruction of the first building erected in California as a theater. The original playhouse, built of wood frame and canvas, with a tin roof, provided Gold Rush Sacramento with entertainment for a mere three months before being inundated in the flood of January 4, 1850. Today, the Theatre offers interpretive education programs about Old Sacramento and the Eagle Theatre to mostly 4th-5th grades on a reservation basis.

## **On Stage in Old Sacramento**

If you're a fan of western history, you know that the 1848 discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill led to quick and drastic changes that have profoundly affected California. Less well known is the fact that one of Old Sacramento's best-known Gold Rush-era structures, the historic Eagle Theatre, operates under the stewardship of the California State Railroad Museum, a part of Old Sacramento State Historic Park. But what do the Railroad Museum and this early Sacramento landmark have in common? How does the Theatre support CSRM's mission and institutional goals? Let's journey back in time to find these and other answers:

It's Spring 1849. Sacramento City is located along the eastern bank of the Sacramento River about 500 feet south of its confluence is the American River. This was the gateway to the gold fields! First mapped in 1848, this waterfront settlement became a bustling tent city overnight. Immigrants from all over the world came rushing to Sacramento hoping to make their fortune in the gold fields. It must have been a tumultuous place! Most of Sacramento's temporary residents undoubtedly had visions of vast, immediate fortune. Nearly all had arrived by sailing ships which slowly made their way up Sacramento Delta waterways from the port city of Yerba Buena, soon to be renamed San Francisco. They came to town only to pause for a short while, re-equipping themselves for the next part of the journey before moving on. Little work would be required to strike it rich, they dreamed; gold nuggets would simply be waiting to be harvested from the riverbeds of the nearby Sierra Nevada foothills.

By July 1849, more than 2,000 could be counted as transient inhabitants of the "tent and board City". Of the general bedlam, the local Placer Times newspaper observed "Goods for which there is no shelter, strewn along the banks; others stored in tents or under old sails, for the scarcity of building material gives rise to a variety of queer substitutes. Numerous diversions quickly sprang up to satisfy the demands of the nearly all-male population of gold seekers and assorted adventurers".

### **Round Tent Saloon**

Among the earliest of these was the "Round Tent Saloon", erected near the corner of Front and J Streets in the late spring of 1849 by Zadock Hubbard and his partners Gate Brown and Madison Pruett. This not only proved immediately successful as a "watering hole" and gambling establishment, but also as the budding settlement's prime location to exchange gold dust and nuggets for U.S. coins. Paper money was not popular at the time due to a number of drawbacks. Not only was it perceived as having "less" value than the hard metal of coins, but also it was

prone to destruction in fire and more difficult to carry.

### **Dawn of a Theatre**

Soon enough, gambling were found not to be sufficiently amusing for Sacramento's constantly changing populace. Perhaps this was due simply to the near-absolute lack of entertainment in the gold fields. Construction of the Eagle Theatre began in July 1849 on what would become California's first permanent theatre and what the editor of the Placer Times would later refer to as "This oasis in a great desert of the mind." Opening September 25th of that year, the Theatre's initial offering featured a hastily arranged group from San Francisco and Stockton performing a minstrel show. "Tickets may be procured at the saloon in front of the theater," stated a note in the opening night's program, referring most likely to the Round Tent Saloon located just outside and to the South of the Eagle Theatre.

Published illustrations, personal accounts, and latter-day recollections of the Theatre are quite telling about life in the Gold Rush. Scarcity of both building materials and labor are evident by the original structure's \$30,000-plus cost. Although the depth of the building remains disputed today, historical accounts and archeology confirm a width of 30 feet. Historians agree that discrepancies regarding the building's length are likely rooted in the Eagle Theatre's constantly evolving nature, as are other contradictory accounts of building details.

According to the contemporary accounts, the auditorium was a small space, sharing a common wall at the back with a saloon. Presumably the saloon was added directly to the Theatre's front when the Round Tent Saloon was moved to make way for a new building next door. Seats were rough boards, without seat-backs, and possibly sitting atop tree stumps and packing crates.

General lighting was provided by three multi-candle chandeliers, while stage lighting most likely was achieved with oil lamps placed directly in front of the stage. Entrance was through the saloon although visiting ladies and genteel men could be spared the indignity of passing through this rowdy space by sitting in the balcony, accessed via an outdoor ladder staircase next to the

main entrance.

For all its colorful performances and primitive appointments, the Eagle Theatre went through four bankruptcies and three changes of ownership in less than three months plus a couple of major re-modelings. Finally, a violent wind and rain storm closed the theater mid-performance on January 4th, 1850. It would not reopen at the same location. Flooding of Sacramento that month took a heavy toll on the entire waterfront area. Water was said to have reached all the way to the Capitol.

### **The Eagle Returns**

Well over a century after the Eagle Theatre's demise, the old waterfront district was proposed to be redeveloped into what we know today as Old Sacramento. By the early 1970's the area was buzzing with activity, with structural repairs under way to a number of historic buildings, and many years' worth of facade remodeling in the process of removal. The California Department of Parks and Recreation awarded a concession contract to the Junior League, allowing it to raise funds and assist in reconstruction of the Eagle Theatre. The total cost of reconstruction the 4,890 square foot facility were approximately \$260,000, with most of this figure coming from donations and fundraising events spearheaded by the Junior league. Reconstruction was complete by early 1974. The first performance, presented on March 14th, was an 1845 patriotic comedy entitled Fashion.

In 1996 as part of an overall restructuring related to Old Sacramento State Historic Park, the CSRSM assumed operation and staffing of the Eagle Theatre. Although "Old" is no longer a part of the title, the Eagle Theatre today presents interpretive programs and hosts community events.

### **Railroading Showplace**

So what do the Eagle Theatre and the CSRSM have in common? To begin with, there are powerful historical and cultural ties between railroading and Sacramento's earliest days.

Although the reconstructed Eagle Theatre is set in an 1849-1850 timeframe, it was just two

years later that the state's first railroad line, the Sacramento Valley Railroad, began building from Sacramento's waterfront to Folsom.

Sacramento's central role in the transportation schemes of California and thus its prominence as a cultural and performing arts center was assured just over a decade later, when the Central Pacific Railroad began construction on the western portion of the nation's first transcontinental railroad. Under the operation of the CSRM the Eagle Theatre has a bright future indeed.