

**California gold; an authentic history of the first find,
with the names of those interested in the discovery;
published by the author, James S. Brown, Salt Lake
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WITH

NOTES AND QUERIES

Extra Number 191

COMPRISING CALIFORNIA GOLD—AN AUTHENTIC HISTORY OF THE FIRST FIND,
WITH THE NAMES OF THOSE INTERESTED IN THE DISCOVERY *James S. Brown (1894)*
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QUERIES.

EDITOR'S PREFACE

THIS is an excessively rare item of its kind, and of vital importance, being the only printed relation — aside from that by Marshall himself — by an eye-witness of an participant in the gold discovery. But two copies recorded as sold at auction.

The Bigler letter is important as the only other such kept by any other member of the little company of workers at the Sutter Mill.

CALIFORNIA GOLD

AN

AUTHENTIC HISTORY

OF THE

FIRST FIND

With the Names of Those Interested in the Discovery

Published by the Author

JAMES S. BROWN

SALT LAKE CITY UTAH

OAKLAND, CAL.

PACIFIC PRESS PUBLISHING COMPANY.

1894.

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**BUT FOUR OF THEM LEFT *Herald*, Nov. 26, 1897 COMPANIONS OF MARSHALL
WHEN HE DISCOVERED GOLD Three of These Aged Pioneers Live In Utah and May
Attend the Golden Jubilee**

San Francisco *Call*: Four men, their bodies bent and faces furrowed by the cares of life and passing time, riding before the society of California Pioneers, will be one of the most interesting, if not striking, features of the Golden Jubilee procession, to be held in this city on Jan. 24. These old men, Henry W. Bigler, James S. Brown, Azariah Smith and William J. Johnston, are the sole surviving companions of Marshall, and were with him when he discovered the shining bit of gold at Coloma. They now live in distant lands, and far from one another, but they will be brought together on the day of the jubilee, perhaps for the last time.

Some time ago Mr. Hittell, pioneer, author and historian, wrote to Mr. Bigler in an endeavor to ascertain the whereabouts and condition of health of his companions. The following answer, written in a hand that portrayed the writer's age and feeble condition, shortly arrived:

“St. George, Utah, Oct. 9, 1897. “Dear Mr. Hittell.—Yours of the 3rd inst. to hand, in which I learn that the society of California Pioneers is considering the project of celebrating, the 24th of January next, the semi-centennial of the discovery of gold at Coloma.

“You wish me to give you a list of the survivors, with their precise names, postoffice address and any information I have in regard to their health and strength.

“James S. Brown. I met him at our great Jubilee in Salt Lake City last July. He was in his usual health, quite lively and talkative as ever. His address is 31 North First West street, Salt Lake City, Utah.

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“Azariah Smith a few years ago was living in Manti, Sanpete county, Utah. I have not heard of his death, nor of his leaving that place. At last accounts his health was pretty good, though he was at time afflicted with fits.

“William J. Johnston. His address at last accounts was Ramah, Valencia county, New Mexico. His health was good then.

“My comrades who were with Marshall at the time he found the gold at Coloma are all dead, so far as I know, except myself and the names I have just mentioned. My health is pretty good for a person of my age, as I am in my 83d year.

“My appetite is good, and people say I hold my age splendidly, and my walk is brisk, though I have to use a cane to steady myself, as I am so light-headed and liable to fall. I am pleased to hear of the move about to be made to celebrate the 24th of January, 1848, and hope you will have a nice time, and it would please me to witness and to be a partaker in the grand festivity on that occasion.

“Any information I may have that you would like to know you only have to write and it will be a pleasing task for me to give it if I can. Respectfully yours, HENRY W. BIGLER.”

The pioneers are confident that all will accept the invitation, and they look forward for a jolly reunion on their part. SALT LAKE CITY, Utah, Jan. 24, 1894.

Just forty-six (46) years ago to-day the great and memorable discovery of the California gold was made at Capt. John A. Sutter and James W. Marshall's sawmill, on American Fork River, California.

Now to give a clear conception of that most notable event, we must go back to the time when the project of building the mill was first conceived by Messrs. Sutter and Marshall, which was on or near the 1st of June, 1847. But, for want of skilled labor, the matter was delayed for a time, as the class of white men that was to be hired could not be trusted so as to justify a man in the undertaking of an enterprise of such importance as building a gristmill, which he already had under

contemplation, and a sawmill forty miles away, in an Indian country; and again, the unsettled condition of the country as it was, so soon after the war, and considering the scarcity of money, 1179 caused Mr. Sutter to hesitate until a detachment of 150 men of the Mormon Battalion came up, August 26, and camped on the American Fork River about two miles from Sutter's Fort. After they had a short consultation it was decided that about one hundred of the party would remain over till the next year, and seek employment as best they could. Accordingly, a committee was appointed to wait upon Mr. Sutter, to learn from him what the prospect for employment was. The committee informed Mr. Sutter that we had carpenters, blacksmiths, wheelwrights, millwrights, farmers and common laborers, and that we should want horses, cattle, and a general outfit for crossing the plains early the next summer, and if we could not get all money, we could and would take a part of our pay in the above mentioned stock and supplies. This proposition seemed to meet with favor from the Captain, as he had an abundance of the above mentioned property, and, if my memory is not at fault, he told the committee to call again, or for the men to come in two or three days, and he would speak further with them.

I understood then that in two or three days he decided to construct the two mills above mentioned, for the greatest obstacle that confronted him had been removed by the propositions that our committee had made to him. I have not heard the foregoing statement denied, therefore it is confirmed in my mind that had it not been for this opportunity the sawmill at least would not have been built, nor the discovery of gold been made at that time. The State of California would have waited indefinitely to have been developed and to be christened the "Golden State," and the entrance to San Francisco Bay might never have received the title of the "Golden Gate."

Quite a number, say from forty to sixty of us, called on Mr. Sutter between August 29th and September 5th. Some were employed to work on the gristmill, others took contracts on the mill race of that mill, the race was seven or eight miles long and was also designed for irrigation.

Alexander Stephens, Henry W. Bigler, James Berger, William Johnson, Azariah Smith, James S. Brown, and Israel Evans, were 118 10 hired to fallow; James W. Marshall (Mr. Sutter's partner), mill-wright. Peter L. Wimmer and family and William Scott had preceded us two or three days. I

think that they had only two wagons loaded with tools and provisions; the teams were oxen and were driven by two of Mr. Sutter's tame or civilized Indians.

It must have been between the 8th and 11th when we came up to the party who had already commenced the erection of a rough cabin, half a mile from the spot or site that Marshall had selected some time before for the mill.

Now the work commenced in earnest; the cabin was pushed, and a second room put on in true frontier style. Some finished up the cabin, others worked at getting out timbers and preparing for the erection of the mill. The site chosen for the mill was at a point where the river made considerable of a bend, and just in the bank of what appeared to be the old bed of the river, which was lowered to carry the water from the mill.

Sometime between the 15th and 20th of January the mill was started up, and it was found that it had been set too low and the race would not carry off the water, but that it would drown or kill the flutter wheel. To avoid this difficulty several new pieces of timber had to be got out, and as there was found suitable timber within ten or fifteen rods from where the tail race entered the river, all hands were set to work getting out the timber at that place.

It had been customary to hoist the gates of the force bay when we quit work in the evening, letting the water through the race to wash away the loosened sand and gravel, then close them down early in the morning, and a gang of Digger Indians had been employed to dig and cast out the cable rock, such as was not moved by the water.

I, having picked up sufficient of the Indian dialect to direct the Indians in that labor, was set to look after that work, and as all hands were getting out timber so near the race, I had stepped away from them and was with the white men when Mr. Marshall came down to look after the work in general. Having talked a few moments, 119 11 he stepped away to where the race entered the river. He discovered a bed of rock that had been exposed to view by the water the night before; the rock that was in sight was in the bottom of the race and was from three to six feet wide and fifteen to twenty

feet long. It appeared to be granite, but so soft that it might be scaled up with a pick, yet too solid to be carried away by the water.

I, being an all-around worker, sometimes called from one thing to another, and the Indians did not require my whole attention, Mr. Marshall called me to come to him. I went, and found him examining the bed rock. He said, "This is a curious rock, I am afraid that it will give us trouble," and as he probed it a little further, he said, "I believe that it contains minerals of some kind, and I believe that there is gold in these hills." Said I to him, "What makes you think so?" He said he had seen the blossom of gold, and I asked what that was, and he told me that it was the white quartz scattered over the hills. I, being no better informed, asked what quartz was. He answered that it was the white flint-like rock that was so plentiful on the hills. I told him that it was flint rock, but he said no, that it was called quartz in some book that he had read, and that it was an indication of gold. He then sent me to the cabin to bring a pan so that we could wash some of the sand and gravel to see what we could find. (It is well to say here that Alexander Stephens, H. W. Bigler, James Berger, Azariah Smith, W. Johnson and the writer had built a cabin near the site of the mill and were doing our own cooking, and it was to this cabin I was sent.) On my return we washed some of the sand and gravel and also some of the bed rock that we scaled up with a pick. As we had no idea of the appearance of gold in its natural state, our search was unsuccessful. Then he said, "Well, we will hoist the gates and turn in all the water that we can to-night, and tomorrow morning we will shut it off and come down here, and I believe we will find gold or some kind of mineral here."

As he was rather a notional kind of man, I had but little thought of what he said; do not think I even mentioned it to the other men. We each went our way and did not see each other till the next morning. 120 12 We in the cabin, at a very unusually early hour, heard a pounding at the mill, and someone said, "Who is that pounding so early?" Some one of the party looked out and said it was Marshall shutting the gates of the fore bay down. This brought to my mind what he had said the evening before about finding gold, and I said, "Oh, he is going to find a gold mine, this morning."

Nothing but a smile of derision stole over the faces of the parties present. We ate our breakfast and went to work. James Berger and myself went to the whipsaw, and the rest of the men some eight

or ten rods off from the mill. I was close to the mill and saw pit, but was also close to the tail race where I could direct the Indians that were there. This was January 24, 1848.

Just when we had got partly to work, here came Mr. Marshall with his old wool hat in hand, and stopped within six or eight yards of the saw pit, and exclaimed, “Boys, I have got her now.” I, being the nearest to him, and having more curiosity than the rest of the men, jumped from the pit and stepped to him, and on looking in his hat discovered say ten or twelve pieces of small scales of what proved to be gold. I picked up the largest piece, worth about fifty cents, and tested it with my teeth, and as it did not give, I held it aloft and exclaimed, “gold, boys, gold!” At that they all dropped their tools and gathered around Mr. Marshall. Now, having made the first test and proclamation of that very important fact, I stepped to the workbench and put it to the second with the hammer. While doing that it occurred to me that while in the Mormon Battalion in Mexico, we came to some timber called manzanita. Our guides and interpreters said that wood was what the Mexicans smelted their gold and silver ores with. It is a hard wood and makes a very hot fire and also lasts a long time. Remembering that we had left a very hot bed of these coals in the fireplace of the cabin, I hurried off and made the third test by placing it upon the point of an old shovel blade, and then inserted it in among the coals, and blew the coals until I was blind for the moment, in trying to burn or melt the particles; and although it was plated almost as thin as a sheet of note paper, the heat did not change its appearance in the least. I remembered hearing that gold could not be burned up, so I arose from this third test confident that it was gold. Then running out to the party who were grouped together, made the second proclamation, saying, “gold! gold!”

At this juncture all was excitement, and all repaired to the lower end of the tail race, where we found from three to six inches of water flowing over the bed of rock, in which there were crevices and little pockets, over which the water rippled in the glare of the sunlight as it shone over the mountain peaks. James Berger was the first man to spy a scale of the metal. He stooped to pick it up, but found some difficulty in getting hold of it as his fingers would blur the water, though he finally succeeded. The next man to find a piece was H. W. Bigler; he used his jackknife, getting it on the point of the blade, then, getting his forefinger over it, placed it in his left hand. And as we soon learned how to look for it, as it glittered under the water and in the rays of the sun, we were all

rewarded with a few scales. Each put his mite into a small vial that was provided by Marshall, and we made him the custodian. We repeated our visits for three or four mornings to the tail race, each time collecting some more of the precious metal, until we had gathered somewhere between three and four ounces.

The next move was to step and stake off two quarter sections beginning at the mill, one running down the river and the other up. Then we cut and hauled logs and laid the foundation of a cabin on each of them; one was for Sutter, the other for Marshall. Now, this matter being finished, Mr. Marshall was prepared to dictate terms to us, for every tool and all the provisions in that part of the country belonged to Capt. Sutter and Mr. Marshall, and they had full control, and we were depending on the completion of the mill for our pay. He said if we would stay by him until the mill was completed and well stocked with logs, he would supply us with provisions and tools and the first right to work on their gold claims.

So we all agreed to his proposition, and also that we would not disclose our secret of the gold discovery until we learned more about it and had made good our claims. Not having the remotest idea of its extent, we pushed the mill as rapidly as possible, for as yet we had not received one dollar's pay for our four months' labor.

There came a rainy day, and it was too wet to work; H. W. Bigler thought it a good day to hunt ducks, so he got on an old coat, and was gone all day. When he returned, we said, "Where are your ducks?" He said, "Wait awhile, I will show you; I have got them all right." Finally he drew an old cotton handkerchief from his pocket, in a corner of which he had at least half an ounce of gold tied up. For a while all were excited, and he was asked a great many questions like the following: "Did you find it on Sutter's claim along the river?" "How far is it from here?" "All in one place?" "Is there any more?" "How did you get it, you had no pick nor shovel?" "Can you find the place again?" He said that he had found it down below Sutter's claim, along the river where the bed rock crops out along the bank, and in little rills that come down the hills to the river, and everywhere that he found the bed rock cropping out. "Then you found it in more than one place?"—"Yes, more than a dozen." It was now proposed that we keep this discovery a secret, as the discovery in the

race had been kept. So the mill work was pushed with vigor to completion. But in the meantime Marshall felt it had become his duty to inform his partner of the discovery. Accordingly he wrote a letter stating the facts, and sent me out to find a strange Indian that would take it to Capt. Sutter, fearing that if he sent it by someone that was acquainted with the facts, the secret might leak out. Just about this time W. Johnson found that he had some urgent business below and he must go, and he did; he went to the gristmill and along the camps on that mill race. And somehow or other the bag came untied and our old cat and all the kittens ran out, and to the camps they went, until everybody heard them. But, like all great truths, people were slow to believe the story.

However, Sidney Willis and Wilford Hudson began to feel that they would like a little venison, and with that for an excuse took their guns and set out on foot, having been assured that by following up 123 15 the river they would come to the sawmill, which they succeeded in doing the first day. I think that it was only thirty-five miles distant. I think that they stayed one day and two nights with us, then after a thorough examination of the bed rock, sand and gravel, and the surroundings, they gathered a few specimens, among which was one nugget worth about five dollars, the largest by odds that had been discovered up to that time.

As they passed down on their way home they discovered a small ravine or creek in which there was some of the same kind of bed rock that they had seen at the mill race, and by picking around in the sand and gravel they discovered quite a rich prospect that was just opposite what was afterwards called Mormon Island, about twelve or fifteen miles above the gristmill and about the same distance below the sawmill. Then they returned to the mill and told their story and showed the specimens to the boys. Then some went to Sutter's Fort, to a little grocery store kept by a Mormon by the name of Smith, that came around by the ship "Brooklyn." The story of the find was told to him and specimens exhibited to him, and he wrote to Saml. Brannan, who was publishing a paper in San Francisco at that time, and from that press the news went forth to the world. Brannan was a Mormon elder, and the press was owned by a company of Mormons that had come from New York around Cape Horn and were presided over by S. Brannan.

Having explained briefly the find and proclamation, we will return to the mill race, while from 100 to 150 Mormons flocked to Mormon Island, and then people from every part of the States followed, and the search for gold was commenced in earnest. With jack, butcher, and table knives the search was made in the crevices, after stripping the soil from the bed rock with pick and shovel. Next, we conceived the idea of washing the sand and small gravel in time pans, but these were scarce and hard to get hold of. Alexander Stephens dug out a trough, leaving the bottom round like a log. Filling that with sand and gravel that we scraped off the bed rock, he would shake it, having arranged it so as to pour or run water in on 124 16 the gravel; finally he commenced to rock the trough, which led to the idea of a rocker, which caused the gold to settle at the bottom, and he had it arranged on an incline so that it would naturally not only work to the bottom, but to the lower end of the trough, then at short intervals he would turn it into a tub of water, and at night it would be cleaned and weighed on a pair of wooden scales that he also made, using silver coins for weights, counting the silver dollar equal to one ounce of gold. The rocker above mentioned led to the renowned gold rocker; I am under the impression that Stephens did make the first rocker ever used in California. We made buckskin pouches or wallets to carry the gold in; it was not dust, nor yet nuggets, but small scales.

The next and last process that we used in gathering was to spread a sheet on the sand beach of the river, placing some big rocks on the corners and sides to keep it well stretched, then fill the rich dirt on the upper edge, then throw water on to wash the dirt down in the river, leaving the gold on the sheet, occasionally taking up the sheet and dipping it in a tub of water, thus washing the gold off the sheet into the tub, and at night clean up our day's work, averaging from \$12 to \$15 per hand. Our best paying dirt was carried on our shoulders from Dry Gulch all the way from fifteen to sixty rods, to where we could find water to wash it with.

In the latter part of June, 1848, we left the gold fields of California to meet our fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters, and our dear friends in what was called the Great American Desert, now called Utah Territory.

To Sutter's capital and enterprise and Marshall's shrewd sagacity has been given the credit of the great gold discovery of California. The facts are that James W. Marshall discovered the first color, and in less than an hour six Mormons found color as well, and in less than six weeks had discovered it in hundreds of places that Mr. Marshall had never seen, the most notable of which was Mormon Island, to where the first rush was made, and from where the news was spread to the uttermost bounds of the everlasting hills and to all the nations of the earth.

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As to Sutter's enterprise and capital, he did furnish the Graham flour and mutton, wheat and peas, black coffee and brown sugar, teams and tools, while we, the members of the Mormon Battalion, did do the hard labor that discovered the metal, and it is also true that we were in Sutter's employ at that date, and that we did not get paid for our labor.

I worked 100 days for the firm, and never received one farthing for it. I heard a number of other men say that they never got their pay. Then it was our labor that developed the find, and not theirs, for many of them were never paid; and when we went for a settlement we were told by Capt. Sutter that he could not settle with us for his bookkeeper had gone to the mines and his books were not posted. He cursed Marshall and the mines, and declared that he was a ruined man, that the discovery was his ruin, for it had drawn off his laborers and left everything to go to rack, and he was being robbed.

I do not wish it to be understood that I charge them with being dishonorable, for I do not, but I charge it to the general confusion of the country. I think they were honorable men in a business way. But the facts are they were perfectly overrun with all classes of people, and confused, so that the people took advantage of them, and their business affairs were undermined, and there was a general collapse of every industry and business. The cry was “gold! gold! more gold! away for the gold fields!” Every other enterprise was sacrificed at the sight of gold.

With all due respect to Capt. John A. Sutter and James W. Marshall, to whom the world has given the credit of the great find, I do believe if they had been taken out and shot to death the day of the

discovery they would have suffered less, and would have met their Maker just as pure, if not more honored in this world, than to have lived and endured what they did.

As far as I am concerned, I say peace to their remains, for on this earth they have been greatly wronged, if I have read their history correctly. Like a lynching scrape where there is an outburst of the 126 18 people, it is very difficult to find those who are responsible for the crime; so with the wrongs done these men, it seemed as if the whole country or people picked upon them.

The above has been written from memory, as it has been indelibly impressed upon the mind of the writer by the greatness of the results flowing therefrom, and the numerous inquiries that have been made of him, which have been answered by reciting it so repeatedly—if not all at once, it has been at different times—so that after reading and revising it, I can testify from the best of my knowledge, it is strictly correct.

The following are some extracts from letters received, showing the relation of the writer to the gold discovery and incidents of close connection to the history as given in this work:—

ST. GEORGE, Utah, Dec. 20th, 1885. DEAR BROTHER JAMES:—I have just received a letter from John S. Hittell, San Francisco, Cal., an entire stranger to me. He wishes to get all the information he can in relation to the discovery of gold at Sutter & Marshall's sawmill, in 1848, and if any of the mill hands knew of a man by the name of Humphry, who claims to have been the first person who introduced the Rocker there and taught the mill hands how to wash gold. I have answered his letter, saying there may have been a man there by that name, but as for introducing a Rocker and showing us how to wash the Platter was something I have no knowledge about. The tin pan was used, and they were scarce. A wooden tray, made by Alex. Stephens to knead dough in, was used by me, and as for Rockers, up to the time we left, in '48, there was none that I saw or heard of at Marshall's mill, or anywhere else in Cal. And again, he says he wants the exact date of the discovery. I have told him that my journal has the discovery on the afternoon of January 24th, 1848, and he says he has corroborative evidence that such was the fact, instead of the 19th of January, as Marshall has it in his history, and he wishes to establish that fact—that Marshall

was mistaken in his date—and Mr. Hittell wants the address of yourself, E. Stephen, and others who may have been present at the sawmill when the precious metal was discovered. I shall, to-day, write and send him your address, as he wishes to write 127 19 to you, also to Stephens, but I have not his address. Please tell me where Alex. lives by giving me his post office address. I think I will tell Hittell he can write to Alex. and send it to your address or care, and you will forward it to him. Can you give me Barger's and Azariah Smith's post office address? I write this that you may understand more fully, should you receive a letter from Mr. Hittell. He has written to me two letters, and it appears he is a person of prominence, is an author, and is writing the History of Cal. and its resources.

Yours truly,

HENRY W. BIGLER.

1025 HYDE STREET, SAN FRANCISCO, Dec. 26, 1885. JAMES S. BROWN, DEAR SIR:—I mail to you to-day a copy of an address delivered by me before the Pioneer Society, of this city, in reference to the gold discovery. I have recently heard from Henry W. Bigler that you are living and are in Salt Lake City, and as I am in want of some information, I write to you.

Do you know on what day gold was discovered at Coloma?

Do you know when the first rocker was used in gold mining, at or near Coloma?

Do you know who used it?

Do you know whether anyone at Coloma, except H. W. Bigler, kept a diary about the time of the gold discovery?

What is the post office address of Alexander Stephens? Could he probably tell me anything more than you can tell me?

Any corrections of my statements in the pamphlet, or remarks upon them, will be welcome.

I inclose an envelope for your reply if you favor me with one.

Yours, JOHN S. HITTELL.

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**THE WORKS OF HUBERT HOWE BANCROFT THE HISTORY COMPANY, No. 607
Market Street, N. J. STONE, MANAGER. SAN FRANCISCO, Dec. 20, 1886. MR. JAMES S.
BROWN, Salt Lake City, Utah.**

DEAR SIR:—We have received and read with very great interest some notes of yourself given to Mr. L. H. Nichols, and especially that part of your experience in which you tell of the discovery of gold in California. The information you have given is important. We are not aware at this moment whether Mr. Bancroft has all his data bearing upon the point that you bring out, or not; we regret that we had not found you out earlier, as to enable us to present your notes to Mr. Bancroft before his text had gone on so far, but even to-day what you contribute to his material on the gold discovery will be of greater or less value, and we shall forward it to his library at once.

You have had a very unusual and evidently a very useful experience, altogether—one that is pleasant to remember, and one in which a man at your time of life can well feel satisfaction. Your missionary work among the Indians, whose language you seem to have a most remarkable facility for acquiring, is a piece of history itself, and it would seem that with the information about the language, habits, customs, and domestic relations of the number of tribes that you have gone among in the way you have, would make a most interesting volume alone. We very much appreciate your kindness in giving these items to Mr. Nichols, and you may accept from us the kindest acknowledgment from the author himself.

We are gratified to know that Mr. Nicholas has had a chance to meet you and know you, and we sincerely trust that, as he promises us, you will take hold and assist him in promoting his work among your good people.

We remain, dear sir,

Sincerely yours,

THE HISTORY COMPANY,

D. S. SESSIONS.

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While much more might be said quite as correct, I have deemed this account sufficient for the ordinary inquiring mind, therefore I respectfully submit it to be filed away as a true history, feeling that it is only just to give honor to whom honor is due:—

Signed, JAMES S. BROWN,

31 North, 1st West Street, Salt Lake City, Utah.

We, the undersigned, know the foregoing to be a true and correct statement of the first discovery of gold in California:—

Witnesses,

ORIN HATCH,

Woods Cross, Davis County, Utah.

GEORGE W. BOYD,

Salt Lake City.

H. D. MERRILL,

427 N. 2d W., Salt Lake City.

WILLIAM S. MUIR,

Woods Cross, Davis County, Utah.

ISRAEL EVANS,

Lehi, Utah County, Utah.