

New Orleans to San Francisco in '49

by Tabetha F. Bingham



ABOUT THE READING Between 1848 and 1850, more than 80,000 prospectors rushed to California in search of gold. Tabetha Bingham was only ten years old when she made the journey to California. She begins her story in the following passage.

VOCABULARY

fraught filled; loaded
whimsical unpredictable
outlay spending



As you read the passage below, remember that this is a true account.

I have heard and read the accounts of many journeys to California in the eventful years between 1840 and 1850; but the accounts were all given by those of mature years at the time of making those journeys. I made the journey to California in 1849. I was only a little girl in my tenth year at that time; but the journey was so **fraught** with trouble, hardships, and suffering, that it made an impression on my mind that forty-one years have not erased or dimmed.

This story was published in the *Overland Monthly* in 1892.

At the time of the discovery of gold in California our family, which consisted of father, mother, and six children (two boys and four girls), was living on a large cotton plantation in Louisiana. My father was an invalid, having suffered greatly from inflammatory rheumatism for many years. His sickness had made him very **whimsical** . . . He read all the marvelous reports of the discovery of gold, and . . . he believed them all. . .

Rheumatism may cause swelling and pain in the joints, bones, and muscles.

He immediately had an auction and sold off all his personal property. . . He expected to take passage in the first ship that was to sail around the Horn, as his physicians had told him that he could not possibly live to make the journey by any other route.

Source: Oakland Museum of California, *More Tales from the Mines*, copyright © 1998. <http://www.museumca.org/goldrush/tales.html>

But when we arrived in New Orleans he found that although there were several ships fitting out to go to San Francisco via Cape Horn, none of them would be ready to sail in less than two weeks. His impatience to start was so great that he determined to take passage in a steamer that was to leave for the Isthmus of Panama in six days.

He then at once began to lay in a two years' supply of provisions and clothing for the family, together with a complete camping and mining outfit. He also bought a set of carpenter's tools and [building supplies] . . . for a . . . house. These purchases necessitated the **outlay** of considerable money, which, had we gone via Cape Horn, would have been money well invested, as all the articles were worth at that time from twenty to a hundred per cent more in San Francisco than in New Orleans. But my father, like thousands of others in those days, did not for a moment consider how those things were to be carried across the Isthmus.

Why do you think these items cost so much more in San Francisco?

Because they were going to go across the Isthmus of Panama, the family would be forced to carry the supplies across land.

ANALYZING LITERATURE

1. Main Idea Why was Tabetha's father willing to risk so much to get to California?

2. Critical Thinking: Making Predictions Do you think the family's journey to California went well? Explain.

3. Activity You are an editor and you plan to include Tabetha's story in a book about the Gold Rush. Design a cover for your book.