



A History of the City of San Francisco

John Hittell

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From the preface: "This book was written at the request of the committee appointed to manage the celebration in San Francisco of the Centennial Anniversary of the Declaration of our National Independence, in accordance with a resolution adopted by Congress on the thirteenth of March, 1876, recommending that in every town the delivery of a historical sketch of the place from its foundation should be part of the local celebration. It was considered better that, instead of a brief sketch to be read publicly in an hour, the metropolis on the American coast of the North Pacific should have a book of several hundred pages. The city furnishes material enough for a history which could never be prepared on a more appropriate occasion than in commemoration of the National Centennial year, especially since it happens to coincide with the completion of the first century in the existence of our city. Such a double epoch demanded some special mark of recognition. There are urgent reasons why works of this kind should be written by pioneers, and while there are still hundreds of pioneers living to furnish information from their personal reminiscences and from papers that will be lost when they die. No record, however brilliant in its composition or comprehensive and careful in its statements, could ever be accepted as satisfactory, as to many of the great events that have occurred here on a comparatively small stage of action within the last thirty years, unless based on the authority of the actors themselves—who, with highly-wrought feelings, often played for the great stake of fortune, and sometimes for the still greater one of life, running through a succession of rapid and startling vicissitudes. "Whatever misfortunes have overtaken the individual citizens, they have the consolation of seeing that California has advanced with a swift and grand prosperity, and that they have participated in one of the most imposing pageants ever enacted on the stage of universal history. The scenes which I must try to depict for the reader will show a multitude of figures and many phases of passion. A host of adventurers flocking from the centers of civilization on the shores of the Atlantic, half across the world, to a remote corner on the coast of what was then the semi-barbarous Pacific, coming to make a brief stay in the rude search for gold, brought a high culture with them, and suddenly lifted their new home to an equal place among the most enlightened communities. The early American settlers in California, instead of being, as many persons at a distance supposed they would be, the mere offscourings of a low rabble, were, in a large proportion, men of knowledge and capacity; and if generally inexperienced in high station and serious responsibility, yet not incompetent for them. At brief notice they organized a state, complete in all its parts. As if by magic, their touch or their influence created magnificent cities; clipper ships, that cast the boasted India-men of England into disrepute; two railroads, connecting the Atlantic with the Pacific; a line of ocean steamers, connecting Asia with America, and a telegraph line from the Golden Gate to the Mississippi."

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