

Great train robbery of 1870



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Great Train Robbery of 1870 outside Verdi, Nevada actually happened as depicted in this story. It was reported to be the first train robbery in the Western states. The names of the robbers their plan and their ultimate prison sentences are true, except for Brewster Purvis who is fictional. I took some liberties with their various roles in the robbery and the part about half of the money not being recovered is fiction. In actuality approximately 90 percent of the loot was later found. As for the small amount that was never recovered it would be worth approximately \$500, 000 today, and there are some people who still believe it remains hidden out there somewhere and maybe still looking for it!

The Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) poem was not published at the time of this story. Although she was still alive and had written well over a thousand poems by 1877, she was an intensely private writer as well as a recluse and only 7 of her poems were published in her lifetime. Some biographers believe her poetry and complete withdrawal from society came about as a result of heartbreak and unrequited love. Her poetry often reflects loneliness but is also inspirational. Upon her death, her sister Lavinia co-edited three volumes of her poems published from 1891-1896. The complete poem:

Hope is the thing with feathers

That perches in the soul,

And sings the tune without the words,

And never stops at all,

And sweetest in the gale is heard;

<https://assignbuster.com/great-train-robbery-of-1870/>

And sore must be the storm

That could abash the little bird

That kept so many warm.

I've heard it in the chillest land,

And on the strangest sea;

Yet, never, in extremity,

It asked a crumb of me.

In the 1870s-80s more than 300 mines were producing gold in Amador County. A 20-mile stretch from the Mokelumne River to the Cosumnes River known as the Mother Lode was the richest producing over \$160 million in gold between 1851 and 1942. There were some tunnels, but mostly incline and vertical shafts were built reaching down a mile or more into the ground. Head frames crowned shafts and stamp mills processed and crushed the ore. Workers came from all over the world, with large groups from Italy, France, Yugoslavia and Cornwall. The Treasure Mine (MacKellar Amador in this story) actually shared a shaft with the Bunker Hill Mine, which was known as the Rancheria Mine from 1853-1898.

The Secret Service Division began in Washington, D. C. in 1865 with the mission to halt the flood of counterfeit currency that was circulated after the Civil War. During the 19th century, before centralized printing and engraving of U. S. currency, approximately 1600 banks designed, printed and issued their own notes. Each note had a different design making it difficult to

<https://assignbuster.com/great-train-robbery-of-1870/>

distinguish the 4, 000 varieties of counterfeits from the 7, 000 genuine notes. At one time it was estimated that one-third of all currency in circulation in the United States was counterfeit.

In 1867, the Secret Service responsibilities broadened to include all crimes against the federal government such as racketeering, smuggling, mail robbery and land fraud. In 1893, the Secret Service became a distinct organization within the U. S. Treasury Department. In 1894, the Secret Service began the mission we are most familiar with today, protection of the President, with the part-time protection of then President Grover Cleveland.

The Barbary Coast was a neighborhood in San Francisco much as described in this story, so named after the notorious coast of North Africa (Morocco, Algiers, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt) where pirates regularly attacked ships. Pirates of a different kind reigned in San Francisco's Barbary Coast which rose from the massive influx of treasure seekers from the Gold Rush. At the end of 1849, there were only about 300 women in San Francisco out of a population of 20-25, 000 and two-thirds of these women were available-for a price. For most of the 19th century and early into the 20th century the area continued to be a haunt for every kind of low life and crime. Gambling, prostitution, thievery, opium dens, murder and of course shanghaiing prevailed here. Prostitution in the area ended in 1917 when the San Francisco Police blockaded the neighborhood in response to the California Red-Light Abatement Act. Today it is overlapped by China Town, North Beach and the Financial District.

The Miwok were not so much a tribe as an aggregation of villages speaking a common language-Penutian. The names Patee, Kaliska, Litanya, Taipa and Kiku are actual Miwok words or names. They lived throughout California including in the Sierra Nevada and Yosemite area. They referred to the Yosemite Valley as Ahwahnee which loosely translated means "Place of a Gaping Mouth." A large group of Coast Miwok inhabited the Bay area and Marin County including Angel Island. They had a simple animistic philosophy meaning that all life is produced by a spiritual force, all natural phenomena have souls and all animals were believed to have preternatural powers. They were hunter/gatherers and traded with the Paiute people. Acorns were a diet staple. The shamans were both men and women and supposedly had the power to cure, kill, predict the future and start the rains. Shamanistic power was passed down to the son, daughter, grandson or granddaughter of a shaman. They observed many long vigils in lonely places and were sometimes so feared they were driven away from the villages by the other tribal members.

During the peak gold rush years of 1849-54, over 200, 000 emigrants traveled overland to California hoping to strike it rich in the gold fields. The majority were unsuccessful. About one in five died during the perilous journey and many were forced to leave belongings alongside the trails.

Prior to the gold rush, in 1844, the Stephens-Townsend-Murphy party faced the dilemma of how to surmount the Sierra Nevada. They met a Paiute Indian whom they named "Truckee" who provided directions on how to follow the Truckee River to a pass over the Sierra Nevada usually known as Donner Pass but more correctly as Stephens Pass. The Stephens party

became the first to complete this trek overland by wagon. In 1845-46 improvements to this route over the Sierra Nevada, via Dog Valley and Roller Pass, turned it into an established wagon trail. Other wagon routes included the Carson Trail to Georgetown, the Johnson Cutoff to Placerville, the Volcano Road to Volcano, Walker River-Sonora Trail to Sonora and the Big Tree Road. There were also a number of pack trails over the Sierra Nevada. All these trails branched off from one of the three main northern routes to California. Some proved successful while others were short lived or little used.

The construction of the transcontinental railway linking the Union Pacific and Central Pacific Railroads in 1869 made travel easier. Emigrants could travel west or east not only on a network of wagon roads and trails but also by rail.

Geological note: The Sierra Nevada Mountains were formed approximately 150 million years ago when an island arc collided with the West coast of North America, the resultant uplifting created the mountain chain. This event known by geologists as the Nevadan orogeny produced metamorphic rock. Uplift of the Sierra Nevada continues today especially along the eastern side causing minor earthquakes.

The whole idea of a massive cavern is not fiction. There are many instances of incredible underground labyrinths throughout the mountains and foothills of the Sierra Nevada as well as many thermal vents and hot springs. Many of the caverns are open to the public for underground tours-such as Boyden, Moaning, Black Chasm, Mercer and California (formerly Mammoth Cave) Cavern. California Cavern opened way back in 1850 for tours. At Moaning

Cavern, bones of ancient natives dating back more than 13, 000 years were found.