



BICENTENNIAL BULLETIN No. 30 **—Sheffield Celebrates 200th Birthday**

The Sheffield Bicentennial Commission will issue a *Bicentennial Bulletin* each Monday throughout 2015 that illustrates the rich heritage of our communities. **View them at — www.sheffieldbicentennial.org or sheffieldvillage.com**

HENRY WILLIAMS GARFIELD (1821-1892)

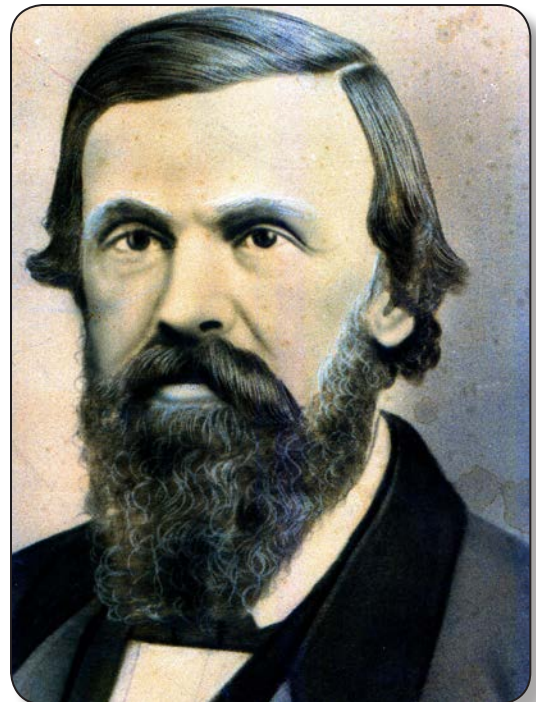
—Sheffield adventurer of the 1849 California gold fields

In January 1848, James Marshall discovered gold at a sawmill he was constructing for John Sutter, about 40 miles northeast of Sutter's Fort near present day Sacramento, California. In the early summer of 1848, Col. Richard B. Mason, U.S. Military Governor of California, and Lt. William Tecumseh Sherman toured the gold fields northeast of San Francisco. They estimated that 4,000 men were already working the gold district, daily extracting \$30,000 or more in gold. Col. Mason obtained samples and sent them to the Philadelphia Mint. The Mint's report was the highlight of President James Polk's message to the 30th Congress on December 5, 1848. Polk pointed out that at the time of California's acquisition it was known that precious metals existed there, but "*The accounts of the abundance of gold in that territory are of such extraordinary character as would scarcely command belief were they not corroborated by authentic reports.*" The presence of California gold in the national capitol and the President's statements made headlines throughout America and around the world. Gold fever became an epidemic and *Argonauts* or *Forty-niners*, as they were called, swarmed west by the thousands. In California, it was said, a miner could take a fortune from the hills and streams with little more than a shovel and a tin pan. Thus began the saga of the *Forty-niners*; strike it rich or not—and most did not—the adventure alone was often treasure enough for a lifetime.

Gold Fever soon reached Sheffield and the sons of Sheffield's founding pioneers Jabez Burrell and Milton Garfield began to make plans for the 6-month overland journey to the California Gold Fields. Lyman J. Burrell and Henry W. Garfield constructed wagons that could easily be disassembled and loaded aboard river paddle-wheel boats and headed for the Wellsville, Ohio on the Ohio River in mid-March 1849. They joined eight other men from Lorain and Medina Counties, and adopted the name *Buckeye Company* for their group.

At Wellsville the Company boarded the stern-wheel steamer *Schuylkill* bound from Pittsburgh to St. Louis, with stops at Cincinnati and Louisville before entering the Mississippi River and steaming upstream to the mouth of the Missouri River. In St. Louis they secured passage on the river-steamer *Alice* for the voyage up the Missouri River to St. Joseph. About 30 miles downstream from their destination one of the boilers exploded, and the passengers had to wait on shore at a Kickapoo Indian village until the steamer, "a miserable boat" named *Mary*, was able to cram them on onboard for the remainder of the journey.

Henry Williams Garfield (1821-1892)



At St. Joseph they purchased oxen for their wagons, but soon discovered that the prairie grasses had not yet grown high enough to support their teams on the move. They decided to remain three weeks on the east bank of the Missouri River at a place they named *Buckeye Camp*. Averaging somewhat less than 20 miles per day, the Company traveled overland across the Nebraska Territory, arriving at the Platte River on May 15. The Company's journal reported, "*When we first saw the Indians we did not know what to expect and our captain ordered us to get our guns in order and be all ready in case of trouble. The trouble would have been short if they had proved unfriendly, as there were about 400 of them.*"

Toward the end of May the Company entered Buffalo Country. As a drove of buffalo crossed the Platte River some of the men gave chase and one buffalo was killed affording meat for all. Wolves

Chimney Rock, Nebraska—this 325-foot natural column was an important landmark for the 49ers finding their way to the gold fields (2007)



kept up a lively howling most nights and finally one of the team crawled in a cave, shot one, and dragged it out by its legs. On another occasion Burrell shot off the forefinger of his left hand attempting to shoot a wolf. Rattlesnakes were also plentiful in the prairie and one night a big fat one was fried for dinner.

Between Ash Hollow and Chimney Rock the men had a very sad duty to perform, that of burying one of their Company, "*a young man of the name of Hezekiah Crandall. He died with dysentery last night. It is a sad funeral when a young fellow has to be buried without any coffin, without any religious service and without mourners except his sad faced comrades. We dug a grave in the sand and laid him tenderly down in his traveling clothes and strewed cedar bushes over him and covered him up and drove on.*"

On June 8 the Company passed Scott's Bluffs and from here for the first time the men could see in the far distance the peaks belonging to the Rocky Mountains. On June 20, after waiting three day for their turn, the Company crossed the North Platte River on a ferry operated by the Mormons. They charged \$3 to ferry one wagon at a time across the swollen river and the cattle had to swim alongside. The animals did not take kindly to the water and had to be induced by men on horseback yelling and prodding them.

On July 5 the Company passed Fort Bridger in southwest Wyoming and arrived at Salt Lake City on the evening of July 14, tired and footsore after repairing an axletree on one of the wagons and crossing 48 creeks of different sizes in the afternoon. Henry Garfield prepared a detailed description of the city and its Mormon population.

On September 25, Garfield and Burrell reached the Feather River gold fields and established claims. They did reasonably well as gold prospectors. At \$16 per ounce gold in 1859, Garfield was able to make up to \$50 per day. At today's value for gold this would be equivalent to approximately \$5,000. A year later he was able to send about 50 ounces of gold back to Sheffield.

Henry Garfield grave marker in Garfield Cemetery

