

# From Distant Lands, They Came Together



Somersville residents Margaret Richmond (standing) with her parents Thomas and Anne who were originally from Wales. Photograph date unknown

Katherine B. Branstetter Collection, EBRPD

The Gold Rush of 1849 brought thousands of people to California, though few struck it rich. As the state's energy needs rose, the Mount Diablo Coal Field met that demand. From about 1860 to 1906, locally mined "black diamonds" (coal) fueled California's growing industry, and five mining towns were built.

Miners came from all over the world—Wales, Italy, Australia, Pennsylvania and beyond—but they weren't the only ones here. Women took care of daily domestic life; children attended schools, played in the streets, and sometimes worked in the mines. Merchants operated stores and hotels. People lived and worked in close-knit communities, shared each other's joys and hardships, and often depended on one another for their very survival.



Sarah Norton (right) was a native of Canada and a midwife. Her husband Noah, was the founder of Nortonville. The woman on the left was a member of the Gordon family of Clayton.

Courtesy of the Contra Costa County Historical Society



Townpeople at the Somersville Hotel, circa 1890s

William Bradley Collection, EBRPD



Edward and Elizabeth MacLeod moved to Somersville from Scotland a few years prior to the birth of their daughter Winifred. Elizabeth did not like this region's dry, hot summers. Photograph circa 1876

Helen S. Moore Collection, EBRPD



West Hartley school group, circa 1890

Courtesy of the Oakland Museum



Nortonville, 1880

George Vivian Collection, EBRPD