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.