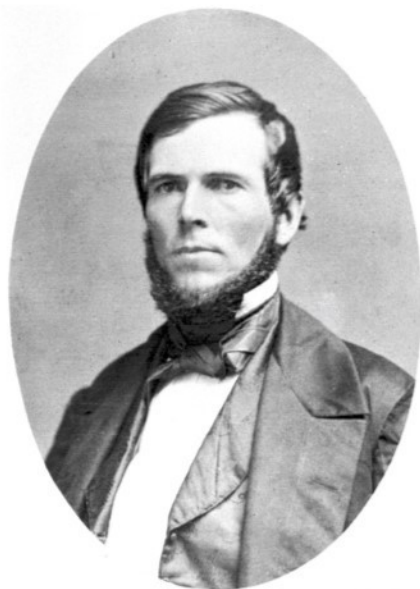




EMIGRANT TRAILS HALL OF FAME

OREGON-CALIFORNIA TRAILS ASSOCIATION



Biography

- Born: 1819, Chautauqua County, New York
- Died: 1900, Chico, California
- Trail pioneer, historian, leader of early California
- Married: Annie Kennedy, 1868

Achievements

- Organized the Western Emigration Society 1840
- A leader of the Bidwell Bartleson Party, the first wagon train to California 1841, and author of a detailed journal recounting the journey
- Served in the California Battalion in the Mexican War
- Owner of Rancho del Arroyo Chico, noted for its innovations in agriculture
- Statesman and philanthropist

John Bidwell

John Bidwell helped to organize the Western Emigration Society in Missouri in 1840. In May 1841, he joined the group that would become known as the Bidwell Bartleson Party, the first wagon train to leave the States with the goal of reaching California. As the company's secretary, he kept a detailed journal, which has become a primary source for information on this trail-blazing company and its trek. In an autobiography he described the trip as follows:

"When you travel all day without water, etc., you are hungry and perhaps have to go half a mile for something to make fire with and when we could not find anything else, we had to pick up buffalo chips. If there is anything bad in a man's character, he will show it then. They used to say that even a preacher could not cross the plains without swearing."

Bidwell worked with John Sutter, explored the Sacramento Valley, and served in the California Battalion during the Mexican War. Soon after gold was found at Sutter's Mill in 1848, he made his own gold discovery on the Feather River at Bidwell Bar. He purchased Rancho del Arroyo Chico and transformed it into a model farm, becoming famous as a leader in California agriculture. He promoted diversity in agriculture, envisioning California as "one grand fruit orchard."

In 1860, Bidwell founded the city of Chico. Always interested in promoting education, he donated his cherry orchard as a site for a State Normal School, now California State University, Chico. During the Civil War he served as a brigadier general in the California Militia, raising troops and supporting the Union cause.

Bidwell served as a congressman (1865-1867) and was the Prohibition Party candidate for president of the United States in 1892.

He was a prolific writer on the history of his overland journey and the development of early California. His home in Chico is now Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park.