

Summary: San Francisco

A Growing City

Many people moved to San Francisco during the Gold Rush. It was the largest seaport near the goldfields. As a result, it quickly became a large city. San Francisco Bay has one of the largest natural harbors in the world. The city became a major trade center in the late 1800s. Mills in San Francisco turned wheat and redwood trees into flour and lumber. These were then shipped to Asia, and silk and furniture were shipped back. In 1869, the transcontinental railroad reached Oakland just across the Bay. People and goods could now travel by railroad to the Bay area and other parts of the country.

Many people came to San Francisco to work in factories and on farms. Others who made fortunes during the Gold Rush built huge houses on Nob Hill. Artists came to sell paintings to these wealthy people and settled in artists' colonies. The first cable car line in the country was built in San Francisco in 1873. Underground gas pipes brought gas and lights to streets and homes.

The Earthquake

On April 18, 1906, a major earthquake hit San Francisco. Many buildings collapsed immediately. People were trapped in buildings, and some died. The earthquake broke many of the underground gas pipes. As the natural gas escaped into the air, small sparks caught it on fire. In no time the city was ablaze.

For three days, more than fifty fires burned. About 28,000 buildings were destroyed. More than half the population lost their homes. Water pipes were broken and fire fighters could not put out fires. Poorly made buildings were not strong enough to withstand the shaking.

The people of San Francisco worked together to rebuild the city. Rich and poor stood in the same lines for water. Architects and engineers studied buildings that had survived to learn what kind of construction best withstood earthquakes and fire. The earthquake showed people how useful cars could be. During the fire, the few cars in the city were the only transportation that got people to safety.



Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

artists' colony *noun*, a community where artists live, work, and learn together

construction *noun*, the way in which something is built



After You Read

REVIEW Why was San Francisco's port important to the city? Highlight the sentence that explains the importance of San Francisco's harbor.

REVIEW Why did fires start after the earthquake hit San Francisco?

Underline the sentences that explain how the fires started.