

## **The Australian Gold Rush**

**Lead: On January 20, 1788, six transports delivered 750 convicts to Botany Bay. Sixty-five years and 168,000 prisoners later, the practice of deportation to New South Wales was abruptly terminated.**

**Intro.: "A Moment in Time" with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: In January, 1851 Edward Hargraves returned to Sydney, Australia. He had spent some time in the Gold Fields during the first years after its discovery in California. This reminded him of similar geological formations he had noted in territory**

**along the Macquarie River northwest of Sydney two decades before.**

**To the amazement of his friends he set out to find the gold he believed to be there. Their ridicule was misplaced. Five months later, in May, as winter began to set in, he announced in a letter to the Colonial Secretary that he had found gold. The excitement was electric and the prospects of finding one's fortune, which rumors described as lying around as huge nuggets waiting to be harvested, began to empty businesses and government offices. Prices for flour, shovels, clothing, blankets, and other equipment shot out of the roof and from all over the world, when word got out that there was gold to be had with little or no effort, adventurers**

**flocked to Australia to make their bundle.**

**This posed a problem for Britain. Before the Revolution, the colonies which came to make up the United States had been the place where England got rid of its convicts and social undesirables. Not wanting to put up with them, the Mother Country would sell them to the colonies as indentured servants. After 1776, America was no longer suitable for this purpose and Australia inherited the dubious honor as England's convict dumping ground. Policy makers in London also reasoned that this would swell the population of a sparse and distant piece of Britain's colonial empire.**

**In 1851, with gold animating the dreams and destinations of thousands, the need for convict workers to fill the remote and vast colonies making up the sub-continent was gone. Numerous public meetings and all the colonial legislative councils had urged Britain to stop transporting criminals to Australia and finally, in 1853, it did so. The Secretary of State said, "it is folly to convey offenders, at the public expense, to gold fields which thousands of honest laborers are in vain trying to reach."**

**The discovery of gold changed Australian history in more ways than one.**

**At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.**

## **Resources**

**Manning, Clark. A Short History of Australia. London, UK:  
William Heinemann, Ltd., 1963.**

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