Exploration and Early Settlement

The Spaniards were the first European explorers to reach California. Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo arrived in what is now San Diego by ship in 1542. However, Spain did not begin to settle Alta California until 1769 when four expeditions (two by land and two by sea) left Baja California and agreed to meet in San Diego. Gaspar de Portola led one of the expeditions by land. After arrival in San Diego, Portola moved north to settle Monterey. In the following years, more parties arrived over land to settle California. Settlers came in search of gold, new land, and American Indians to convert. In 1826, trappers searching for beaver pelts arrived from the east and the north. California’s reputation for excellent climate and soil spread to eastern North America and Europe. Within 50 years, Europeans settled the fertile lands of the lower Sacramento Valley and the coastal plains from San Francisco to San Diego.