

California Historical Fiction

Historical Fiction Set in California

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[1906](#)

by D'Alessandro, James

Against the raging backdrop of the great San Francisco earthquake and fire, this gripping tale of greed, murder, and love, drawn from recent discoveries, is told by a young reporter who vividly brings to life this Victorian-era city that waged two wars--one against nature's forces, and the other against corrupt politicians.

[Angle of Repose](#)

by Stegner, Wallace

A classic saga that traces the fortunes of four generations of one family as they attempt to build a life for themselves in the American West.

[Bear Flag](#)

by Holland, Cecelia

Widowed on the arduous trek west, proud Cat Reilly takes whatever work she can find in Suttor's Fort and mixes with such types as Kit Carson before falling in love and becoming involved in the battle for California's independence.

[Biograph Girl](#)

by Mann, William J.

Blending fact and real-life characters with fiction, this historical novel re-creates the life of Florence Lawrence, an early twentieth-century actress and vaudevillian who by 1910 was the "Biograph Girl," the world's first movie star.

[Blossom Festival](#)

by Coates, Lawrence

This richly panoramic chronicle of rural life in the Santa Clara Valley during the decades before World War II depicts the

complex relationships between parents and children in the changing context of a rich region leaving behind its agricultural past to become Silicon Valley.

[Bohemian Murders](#)

by Day, Dianne

Accepting a temporary position as a lighthouse keeper in the bohemian beach community of Carmel-by-the-Sea, Fremont Jones tries to find the identity of a dead woman who washes up on shore.

[Bone](#)

by Ng, Fae Myenne

Two generations of San Francisco's Leong family live in uneasy tension as they try to fathom the source of their family's sorrow.

[Bright Web in the Darkness](#)

by Saxton, Alexander

Set in the San Francisco Bay area during World War II, Bright Web in the Darkness is a novel that illuminates the role of women workers during the war and the efforts of African Americans to achieve regular standing as union members. The central characters are two young women - one black, one white - who become friends in a welding class and qualify for the shipyard jobs opening to women as male workers are drafted.

[Calico Palace](#)

by Bristow, Gwen

California in the year before the Gold Rush provides the setting for this novel which centers on the colorful characters who journeyed west seeking adventure or refuge.

[California Dons](#)

by Milliken, Ralph

A novel based on the personal recollections of Señor Don Estolano Larios, tells of the childhood and young manhood of a Mexican in California in the mission days.

[California Gold](#)

by Jakes, John

In 1886, eighteen-year-old James Macklin Chance journeys from Pennsylvania to California to make a new life for himself, finding love, power, and fortune in Southern California.

Californians

by Atherton, Gertrude

Depicts life in California at the turn of the century as seen through the experiences of the shy, plain daughter of a Spanish grandee and the vivacious, beautiful daughter of a San Francisco entrepreneur.

Californios

by L'Amour, Louis

The Mulkerin Brothers, in a desperate attempt to settle the debt on their ranch, follow an Indian mystic to California in search of gold, with a gang of greedy gunfighters riding hard on their heels.

China Boy

by Lee, Gus

An American-born son of an aristocratic Chinese family struggles with the uncertainties of growing up torn between two cultures in a tough San Francisco neighborhood during the 1950s.

Climate of the Country

by Mueller, Marnie

The stories of the Japanese Americans interred at the Tule Lake Relocation Center during the second World War are told by Denton Jordan, a conscientious objector who both lives and works in the camp.

Daughter of Fortune

by Allende, Isabel

Raised in the British colony of Valparaiso, Chile, after being abandoned as a baby, a pregnant Eliza follows her lover, Joaquin Andieta, to California at the height of the Gold Rush and finds adventure and adversity on her road to independence and love.

[Day of the Locust](#)

by West, Nathanael

Hollywood of the 1930s and the collapse of the American dream are seen through the eyes of a refined, educated set designer and an inarticulate bookkeeper from Iowa.

[Down to a Soundless Sea](#)

by Steinbeck, Thomas

Drawing on the culture and history of northern California, a collection of short fiction captures a world in which nature has a profound influence on the sailors, immigrants, ranchers, and others who dwell on the edge of a frontier.

[Eye of the Bear](#)

by West, Naida

A compelling tale of pre-gold-rush California, depicting the conflict among the Native Americans, the Spanish/Mexican secular rulers, and the religious zealots of the early California Missions.

[Ghost Woman](#)

by Thornton, Lawrence

Converted to Catholicism by a well-meaning priest, native American woman Soledad settles into a white community in Santa Barbara, California, in the 1800s and encounters friendship and betrayal.

[Gold](#)

by White, Stewart E.

Four men form a partnership as they come through the Panama Canal on their way to the Gold Rush, and they support each other through their gains and their losses in the fields.

[Grapes of Wrath](#)

by Steinbeck, John

Depicts the hardships and suffering endured by the Joads as they journey from Oklahoma to California during the Depression.

Gringo Amigo

by McCarthy, Gary

In the violent days following the California gold rush, Irish immigrant Michael Callahan must go to the aid of Joaquin Murieta, the Robin Hood of California who saved his life years before and who is the target of bounty hunters.

Hollywood: A Novel of America in the 1920s

by Vidal, Gore

Follows the career of Caroline Sanford, a brilliant and beautiful newspaper publisher who leaves Washington to become a Hollywood producer and movie star.

Human Comedy

by Saroyan, William

Members of the Macauley family find their peaceful existence in rural California greatly changed in the early months of 1942.

Immigrants

by Fast, Howard

A multigeneration saga of California focuses on the life of Dan Lavette who, born in a railroad worker's boxcar, becomes a self-made shipping tycoon.

Immortal Wife

by Stone, Irving

Chronicles the indestructible marriage of John C. Fremont and his strong willed wife, who helped aid him in his great accomplishments.

Indian Lover

by Murphy, Garth

Journeying to 1840s California, young Bill Marshall witnesses the tragic experiences of the California Indians and their treatment by Americans after Spain gives control of the territory to Mexico.

Inland Sea

by Varni, Steven

Deciding to get a new perspective on life, Vincent Torno moves away from his protective Italian American family in California to seek a new life in the Midwest in order to see the world through his own eyes.

[Kitchen God's Wife](#)

by Tan, Amy

A Chinese immigrant who is convinced she is dying threatens to celebrate the Chinese New Year by unburdening herself of everybody's hidden truths, thus prompting a series of comic misunderstandings.

[Legend of Fire Horse Woman](#)

by Houston, Jeanne Wakatsuki

Traces the life of Sayo, born under the disastrous sign of the Fire Horse, who comes to America for an arranged marriage and years later is imprisoned with her family in a Japanese internment camp during World War II.

[Love Awakens the Heart](#)

by Wick, Lori

A family saga about a missionary family living in San Francisco in the 1870s.

[Luck of Roaring Camp](#)

by Harte, Bret

In a California gold prospecting camp, Cherokee Sal gives birth to a baby boy, but the mother dies in childbirth. The men of Roaring Camp must raise the child themselves. Believing the child to be a good luck charm, the miners christen the boy Thomas Luck, and then decide to refine their behavior and refrain from gambling and fighting.

[Mendocino](#)

by Greber, Judith

The lives, fortunes, triumphs, tragedies, dreams, and loves of seven generations of a Mendocino, California, family, is set against the growth and changes of their hometown, from 1845 to the present.

[Octopus](#)

by Norris, Frank

Nineteenth-century California wheat farmers wage a fierce battle against the rapid expansion into their fertile lands of the nation's railroads.

[Picture Bride](#)

by Uchida, Yoshiko

Hana travels to America to escape the arranged marriages her sisters experienced in pre-World War II Japan, but the young businessman to whom she has corresponded turns out to be a middle-aged man who exaggerated his success.

[Ramona](#)

by Jackson, Helen Hunt

The absurdity and tragedy of prejudice is illustrated in this classic tale, set in Old California, of Ramona, a young Spanish-American orphan girl and her love for the Native American Alessandro.

[Santa Cat: Behind the Lace Curtains, 1856-1926](#)

by Kock, Margaret

Santa Cat, located at one end of Monterey Bay, also has rum-running, adultery, fraternal orders that would rather play cards than march, houses of ill-repute, sexism and a variety of other shenanigans. In stories more truthful than the history books, Margaret Koch gently and artfully shows us what was really going on behind those lace curtains, as this collection of characters tries to become a real community.

[Sierra: A Novel of the California Gold Rush](#)

by Wheeler, Richard S.

Ulysses McQueen leaves his pregnant wife to search for gold at the same time ex-soldier Stephen Jarvis begins his journey to the West coast, and the paths of the two finally cross in California, by which time they are both changed men.

[Sister Noon](#)

by Fowler, Karen Joy

A mystery set during San Francisco's Gilded Age chronicles Lizzie Hayes's rebellious odyssey away from the pretensions of the city's social elite and her journey toward liberation and passion, with the help of Mary Ellen Pleasant.

[Snow Mountain Passage](#)

by Houston, James D.

Depicts the hardships, tragedy, and devastating starvation that confronted the Donner party, which became trapped by winter snows in the Sierra Nevadas, through the eyes of James Frazier Reed and his eight-year-old daughter, Patty.

[Sorensen Hill](#)

by Sharp, Irene L.

"A true story about the only miner who never packed a gun."

[Thousand Pieces of Gold](#)

by McCunn, Ruthanne Lum

Chronicles the life of Lulu Nathoy, a young Chinese girl--sold as a slave and brought to America--where, later, as Polly Bemis she struggles and survives as a pioneer in the West.

[When the Emperor Was Divine](#)

by Otsuka, Julie

A story told from five different points of view, chronicles the experiences of Japanese Americans caught up in the nightmare of the World War II internment camps.