

Thomas Chavner

Thomas emigrated with his mother from Ireland in 1820 at the age of six. His mother died shortly after arriving in Philadelphia, and he was left in the care of his older brother who sent him to apprentice as a tailor. Thomas ran away and began work as a cabin boy on steamers traveling the Mississippi and Arkansas rivers. This led to encounters with fur traders, and for more than a decade he lived an exciting and dangerous life as a hunter and trapper. During this time Chavner introduced Kit Carson to Captain John Fremont.

In 1846 Thomas served in the Mexican War. He was fluent in the Comanche language and served as an interpreter during treaty negotiations. Thomas was granted permission by Sam Houston to set up a trading post on the Brazos River, where he remained for two years before setting out for California and then Jacksonville, around 1856.

In 1857 Thomas bought 159 acres from another claimant and worked the land with James Hays. Hays showed Thomas a piece of granite that led to the discovery of the famous Gold Hill lode. Chavner and four others filed mining claims and extracted \$700,000 from the pocket lode.

In 1861, Thomas married 33-year-old Margaret Brennan, also from Ireland. They had five children, but, sadly, one son died at the age of 16 months. Margaret died when she was 52, and two years later Thomas married widow Rosa Riley.

Thomas continued to acquire land, saloons, hotels and even built a toll bridge over the Rogue River. Thomas and Rosa donated land for the townsite that would become Gold Hill.