

County of Nevada
State of California

Nevada County Historical Landmarks Commission
Application for Registration of Historical Landmark

Name of proposed landmark

Kentucky Ridge Mine Site

Location_ Near the end of Lone Lobo Trail, at 10615 Lone Lobo Trail, Nevada City,
CA 95959. (plaque location, **GPS 10S 0661173 X 4345714N**) _
Plaque location is near the residence of Craig and Laura Rohrsen.

Name of applicant___ Craig Rohrsen

Address___ 10615 Lone Lobo Trail, Nevada City, CA 95959

Home or work phone_____ cell phone_____

Name and address of landowner upon whose property proposed landmark

Is located, if owner is not applicant_____

I authorize the placing of a plaque or marker on site.

Craig Rohrsen
Landowner's signature

5/7/21
Date

Brief history and description of proposed landmark

(attach additional sheets as necessary)

Kentucky Ridge Mine Site

From 1851-1852, the Kentucky Ridge Mine was the largest enterprise in California operated by enslaved Black labor. During gold rush days, Nevada County had a significant Black population. Most were free, but even though California had entered the Union as a free state, some were enslaved before the Civil War. Gold was first discovered on this property in early 1851. By October, Colonel William F. English brought with him from Florida and South Carolina about 40 slaves to operate the gold mine. He was one of over a dozen slave owners in Nevada County. The mine failed after English was killed in a gun accident on August 27, 1852, and the Black mine workers gradually moved into the towns. They raised families, practiced their trades, opened business, and advocated for civil rights throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. The husband of one of them, Isaac Sanks, a freed Black man, became a religious leader, businessman and newspaper reporter who helped gain Blacks the right to serve on juries and the right to vote by 1870. He is believed to have been the first Black to run for public office in California, when he ran for Grass Valley town trustee in 1870.

See additional, attached.....

Unique aspects or properties of proposed landmark

Very few people in Nevada County are aware that this business venture employed enslaved people that were owned by William F. English in 1851 and 1852. Still fewer people are aware that many of the enslaved people in California had to purchase their own freedom. Few people are aware that William English was one of over a dozen slave owners in Nevada County at the time. Admirably, these enslaved people later became free men and women, respected and trusted members of our early communities. This part of our history regrettably tends to be forgotten. It is time to tell the story of the enslaved people of the Kentucky Ridge Mine and Nevada County during the 1850's. See additional attached....

How will the landmark be protected and maintained?

The historic plaque proposed location is located adjacent to Craig and Laura Rohrsen's home. It is also located on a privately maintained road with minimal traffic.

Bibliography. Cite or attach available books, records, articles or other materials pertaining to the proposed landmark.

Books and articles: "Please see attached"

Historical or civil records: (e.g., ownership, assessments etc.)

Other: (e.g. photographs, prints or drawings. Please list and attach separately)

Craig Rohrsen
Applicant's signature

5/7/21
Date

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The Kentucky Ridge Mine Summary and Timeline

Linda K. Jack
November 17, 2020

In 1851-52 the Kentucky Ridge Mine between Newtown and Rough and Ready in Nevada County was part of the most ambitious and highly capitalized slave-based enterprise in California. The enterprise was the vision of Colonel William F. English (1807-1852). It was comprised of mining in Nevada County and shipping and retail operations in San Francisco. Due to English's accidental death at age forty-five on August 27, 1852 the enterprise was short-lived.

English was born in South Carolina to maternal and paternal families that were affluent cotton planters that used enslaved labor on their plantations. By 1838 English had moved to what was then territorial Florida. There he served in the territorial legislature and militia where he reached the rank of Colonel. He would use the title throughout his lifetime. After Florida gained statehood in 1848, he served in the state legislature and militia. English engaged in a number of businesses in the Florida Keys, and had a plantation on the mouth of the Miami River-now the city of Miami-that was worked by around 100 enslaved people.

In the summer of 1849 renewed fighting between the Seminole and white settlers in the Miami area drove the white settlers south to Key West. The intersection of that outbreak and the discovery of gold in California likely influenced English's decision to go to the gold fields while the Federal Army and Navy made a concerted effort to subdue the Seminole.

In late 1849 English commissioned the construction of a steamship in Philadelphia, the *Commodore Stockton*, to transport himself, other Southern planters and their enslaved people to California to mine for gold. The Philadelphia press reported that there were men and women enslaved by English on board working on the interior of the ship.¹ The *Commodore Stockton* was launched in January 1850, but English delayed his departure to learn whether California would be admitted to the Union as a free or slave state. In spite of California's admission as a free state on September 9, 1850, English proceeded on his journey. The *Commodore Stockton* departed Philadelphia for its trip around The Horn on November 1, 1850. The steamship arrived in San Francisco on April 20, 1851. The thirty-six "unidentified" people in steerage were likely his enslaved workforce.²

¹ *Public Ledger*, October 29, 1850, p. 2.

² https://www.ancestry.com/imageviewer/collections/49066/images/FLHG_SanFranciscoShipPL2-0150?ssrc=&backlabel=Return&rc=602%2C529%2C789%2C575%3B705%2C1329%2C807%2C1374&pid=120664

In 1851 there were numerous press reports of gold discoveries on the Kentucky Ridge between Newtown & Rough and Ready, which may have piqued English's interest in that area.³ I have yet to determine exactly how soon English and his enslaved laborers arrived in Nevada County or when he acquired the mine, but an article in the *Nevada Journal* on October 23, 1851 reported that by that date William F. English had acquired the Kentucky Ridge Mine, and had a "Chilean process quartz mill in operation."⁴ Writing some sixteen years later, Edwin F. Bean elaborated on the acquisition reporting that a ledge was struck on the Kentucky Ridge by "[Guy?] Abel" and Porter" and a large amount of rock was taken out. They contracted with William F. English to build a quartz mill with "two large-sized Chile mill wheels and pan driven by water power with a capacity of reducing about two or two and a half tons in twenty-four hours." Bean went on to write about litigation-that I have yet to find-and that the "affair proved a failure, and was disastrous to all parties concerned."⁵ Writing more generally about the area Bean described the Kentucky Ridge boom as a "bubble" that left miners and investors "flat broke."⁶

English was just one of over a dozen enslavers in Nevada County in the early 1850s, and Southerners were the most powerful force in the state legislature during those early years. So, perhaps it is not surprising that I have yet to find any contemporary reports, or public concern expressed locally about the enslaved labor force that worked the mine. Four of the enslaved people, who were English family slaves from South Carolina and Florida, came to California with the understanding that they would work for eighteen months in exchange for their freedom. English had also purchased additional slaves in Georgia where he had business and family connections. My best estimate is that between 30-45 enslaved people were on the mine site, including women and children. Five of men were enslaved to English's maternal uncle, Richard Fitzpatrick. To my knowledge none of the enslaved people from Florida or South Carolina had mining experience, but there was slave-based gold mining in Georgia, so it is possible English looked for gold mining experience in the people he purchased in that state.

From all accounts the mine was not efficiently run and was operated with crude methods and tools. The tunnel was on the ridge above Deer Creek, so ore had to be carried in baskets from the mine to the mill. Nineteenth century sources reported that there was quality ore on the site, so if the enterprise was a failure, it may have been due to the operation.⁷ It is the case that by early 1852 English was short on cash.

On August 27, 1852, at about noon William F. English was near Coyoteville when he was thrown from his horse. His gun discharged and the shot struck him in the breast. He died instantly.⁸

³ *Nevada Journal*, April 19, 1851, p. 2 and *Sacramento Daily Union*, June 10, 1851, p. 2.

⁴ *Nevada Journal*, October 23, 1851, p. 2

⁵ Bean, Edwin F., *Bean's History and Directory of Nevada County*, 1867, p. 357.

⁶ Bean, Edwin F., *Bean's History and Directory of Nevada County...*, 1867, p. 362. The same information is repeated on p. 203 of Harry Laurens Wells *History of Nevada County...*

⁷ See for example, "Opening of the Slave Mine Expedited," *Morning Union*, August 10, 1934, p. 5.

⁸ *Nevada Journal*, September 3, 1852, p. 2.

English is supposed to have been buried in Pioneer Cemetery in Nevada City, but the location of his grave is unknown. His maternal uncle, Richard Fitzpatrick, who had earlier joined his nephew in California was the administrator of English's estate. An "Administrator's Notice" was published in the *Nevada Journal* on October 1, 1852.⁹ Fitzpatrick began advertising the sale of the mill and machinery in November.¹⁰ By November 30, 1853 Richard Fitzpatrick had returned to Texas.¹¹

Some of the former slaves remained on the Kentucky Ridge to mine for themselves, but many of the single men and those with families migrated down to Grass Valley and settled in the Boston Ravine area. The families included the Thomas-Sanks, Allen, Mills, Green, etc. As the early African American pioneers passed away the local press tended to assume that any Black person who had been in Grass Valley in the early 1850s had been at the Kentucky Ridge Mine, so over the years many people have been erroneously associated with the mine.

Many of the former slaves went on to be pillars of the community and active in church and civil rights affairs. In 1870 Joseph Thomas and his brother-in-law, Isaac Sanks, returned to Florida to visit family that had been left in Key West when Thomas, his brother, Jacob, and their sister, Chasey, had been among those taken on the *Commodore Stockton*.¹² I would love to have heard the stories they told.

Much of the early 20th century writing on the mine uses as its source an article written by Matt Hamilton for the *San Francisco Chronicle* on October 11, 1903 (see attached). It is a frustrating piece because it is written in the "moonlight and magnolia" romanticized style of the Jim Crow era. And it is full of erroneous information and assumptions: that English came from Georgia, that he had a wife (yet to be identified) who freed the slaves, that the enslaved were childishly devoted to him, etc., so I think it is safest to take it with a grain of salt. That said, Hamilton was apparently a city editor for the *Union*, and writing in 1903 he could have very well talked with people still alive who remembered the mine. Edmund Kenyon and others would later rely on Hamilton's article for their writings. Who knows if the illustrations are accurate? The portrait of Chasey Sanks is likely fanciful, as she had died in 1896 at seventy years of age.

I have not included here anything about the workings of the mine after 1852, but it was actively mined into the mid 20th century, so lots of information in the newspapers. Hopefully this is a help, but do let me know what, if any, of these supporting materials in the notes you would like to have.

Linda

⁹ *Nevada Journal*, October 1, 1852, p. 2.

¹⁰ *Nevada Journal*, November 26, 1852, p. 3.

¹¹ Letter from Nathan H. Davis to Mary Davis, November 30, 1853. Furman University Archives, Greenville, South Carolina.

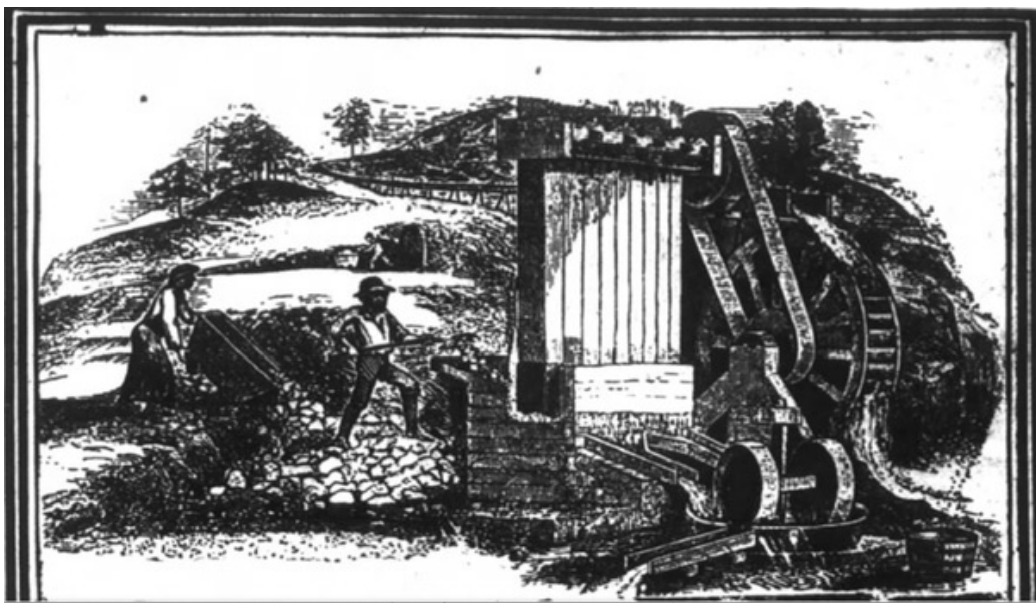
¹² *Daily Union*, July 24, 1870, p. 3.

Overview and Maps, the Kentucky Ridge Mine Slave Colony 1851-1852

Compiled by Chuck Scimeca, Nevada County Historic Landmarks Commissioner

The focus of this article, the years 1851-1852, is the period when mine owner William F. English brought the enslaved people from South Carolina and Florida, to operate the Kentucky Ridge Mine for him, using few tools, requiring difficult physical labor provided by the enslaved people. He also employed the use of a crude quartz mill to process the ore, called a Chile Mill. William English was killed in a gun accident in August of 1852, resulting in the quick dissolution of the mine property and relocation of many of the enslaved people to nearby areas.

Albert B. Adams, years later, manager of the Kentucky Ridge Mine attempted to locate the cabins the enslaved people lived in. Adams said he saw “foundations of loose rock indicated that approximately forty dwellings had ranged on the higher ground above the mine tunnel.” ¹ If Adams is correct, this would place the dwellings just west and below Kentucky Ridge Road, which connects with Lone Lobo Trail. Note, an archeological survey is needed to confirm this and to establish if the rock foundation structure located below Craig Rohrsen’s residence, is a remnant of the original Chile Mill mentioned in Bean’s 1867 History and Directory of Nevada County.



¹ *The Northern Mines, Factual Narratives of the Counties of Nevada, Placer, Sierra, Yuba and Portions of Plumas and Butte*, Kinyon, Edmund, the Union Publishing Company, 1949, p.62

The graphic on the previous page is from the article, *This California Mine Was Worked by Slave Labor*, San Francisco Chronicle October 11, 1909, by Matt Hamilton. Pictured in the foreground is the Chile Stamp Mill that operated at Kentucky Ridge Mine 1851-1852.

(See the San Francisco Chronicle article by Matt Hamilton on p. 9, 10, 11)

The source for the graphic used by the author in the San Francisco Chronicle article, notes it is taken from an “old woodcut.”² The Chile mill’s actual existence in the year 1909 seems doubtful.³ But, the woodcut certainly could have been created by a Kentucky Ridge mine worker in 1851 to 1852 and then utilized years later for the article published in 1909. However, the woodcut could also have been a rendition created many years after operations concluded at the Kentucky Ridge Mine, long after the enslaved people had left for Grass Valley and surrounding towns.

The description of the mill is more precisely described by Edwin F. Bean in his 1867 History and Directory of Nevada County, “The erection of what was called, in those days, a quartz mill. This consisted of two large-sized Chile mill wheels and pan, driven by water power, with a capacity of reducing about two and half tons in twenty-four hours.”⁴

The Kentucky Ridge Mine was located above Deer Creek on the north east side, about 50 yards west of Lone Lobo Trail. The graphic in the article by Matt Hamilton shows water being brought down by flume, seen in the background, to the Chile Mill’s water wheel. The graphic also shows the mine entrance above with two enslaved people, (which corresponds to the location of the mine entrance today) dumping and shoveling ore into the mill. The source of the water brought by the flume appears to be towards the top of Kentucky Ridge above the mine entrance. This would place the water source near the present location of the

² **Woodcut** is a [relief printing](#) technique in [printmaking](#). An artist carves an image into the surface of a block of [wood](#)—typically with [gouges](#)—leaving the printing parts level with the surface while removing the non-printing parts.

³ Nevada Journal, October 23, 1851, p.2

⁴ History and Directory of Nevada County, California, Bean, Edwin F. 1867 p.357

Nevada Irrigation District's (NID) Newtown Canal (Ditch). The original ditch was completed in August of 1851.

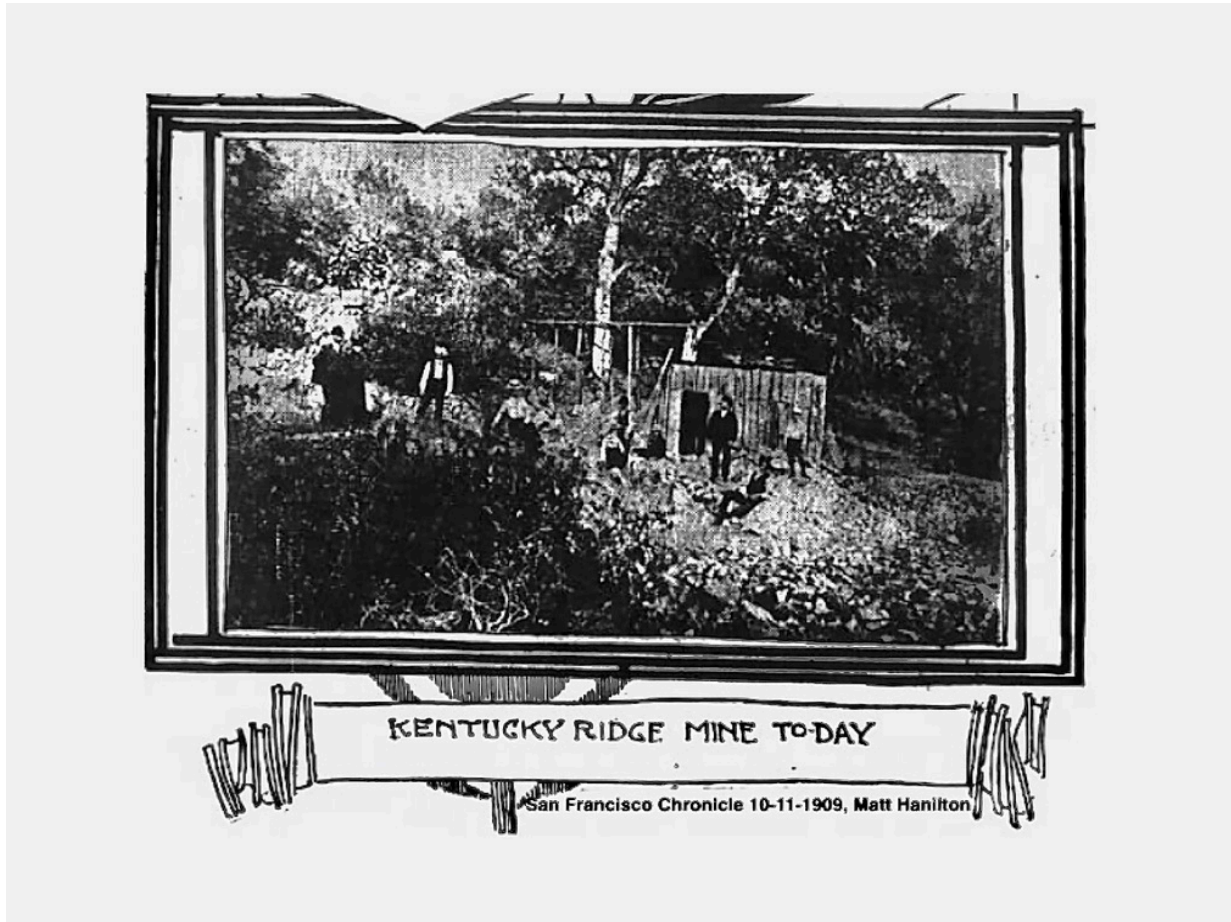
The Ditch was built by Nixon and Young⁵. The Newtown ditch diverted water from Deer Creek below Nevada City and traveled about eight miles to Kentucky Flat. In a recent discussion with retired Nevada Irrigation District Historian, Terry Mayfield, he pointed out that within weeks of the August 1851 completion of the Newtown Ditch, water from Kentucky Flat would have been extended farther west to various mining claims along the north facing slope of Kentucky Ridge, likely including that of the Kentucky Ridge Mine.

The other possible source for the flume water that appears in the graphic by Matt Hamilton could be the old Pleasant Valley Ditch. This ditch appears on the Official Nevada County map 1913 on page 5. This ditch has its source on Deer Creek pictured in section 18, near claim #305, the Niagara Gas Mining Claim. The ditch is located below Craig Rohrsen's residence and just a few yards above the unknown rock and stone remnants that may be the site of the original Kentucky Mine Quartz Chile Mill. Presently the ditch is dry and appears not have been in use for many years. (photo, remnant of possible Quartz Chile Mill below).



⁵ NID pre 1914 Water Rights Report to the Department of Water Resources State of California, October 28, 1986

Today the Newtown Canal (Ditch) continues along the Kentucky Ridge, joining the Pleasant Valley Ditch, then all the way to Lake Wildwood.

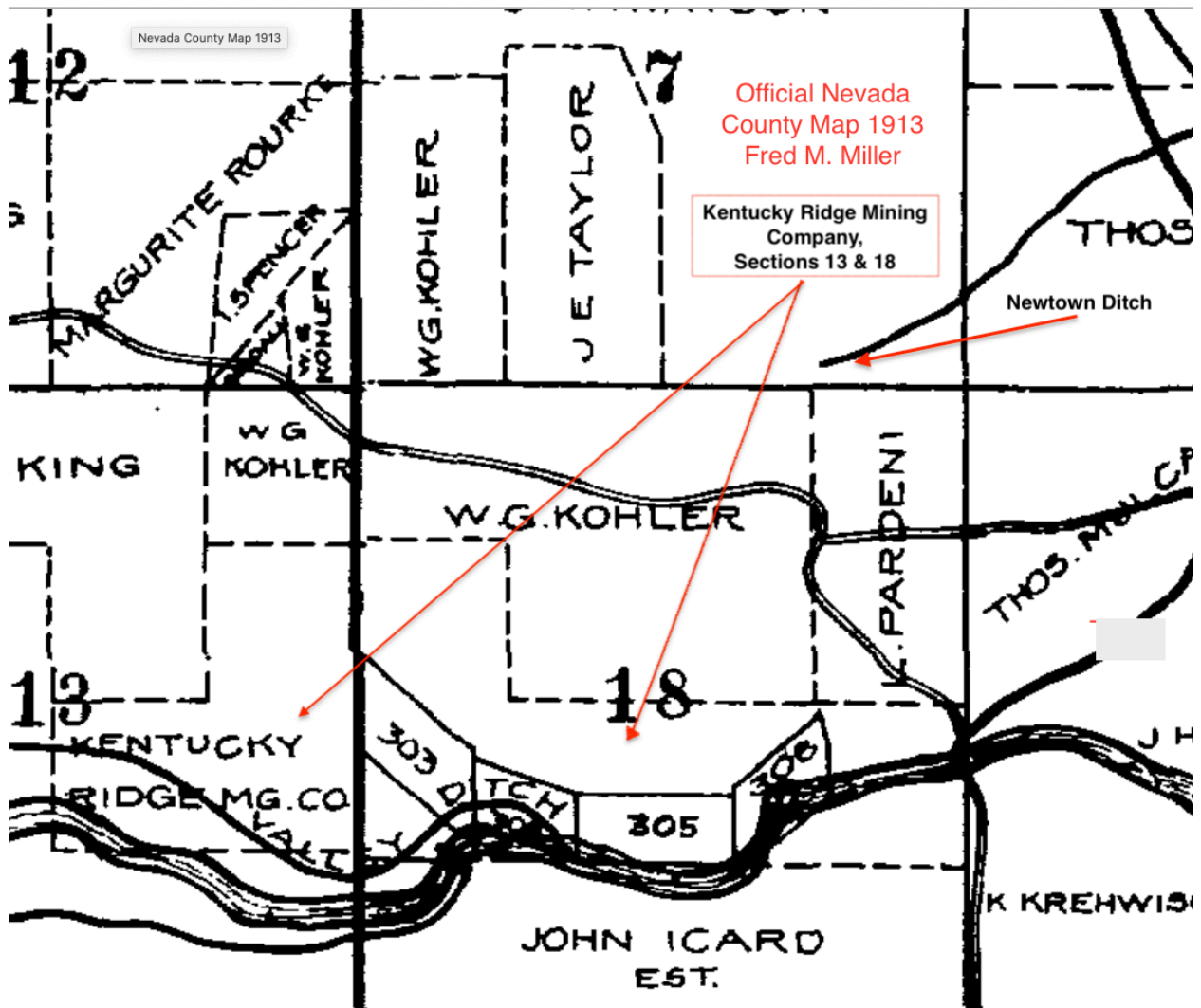


The mine did operate well into the mid twentieth century. Photo above by Matt Hamilton, article San Francisco Chronicle 1909.

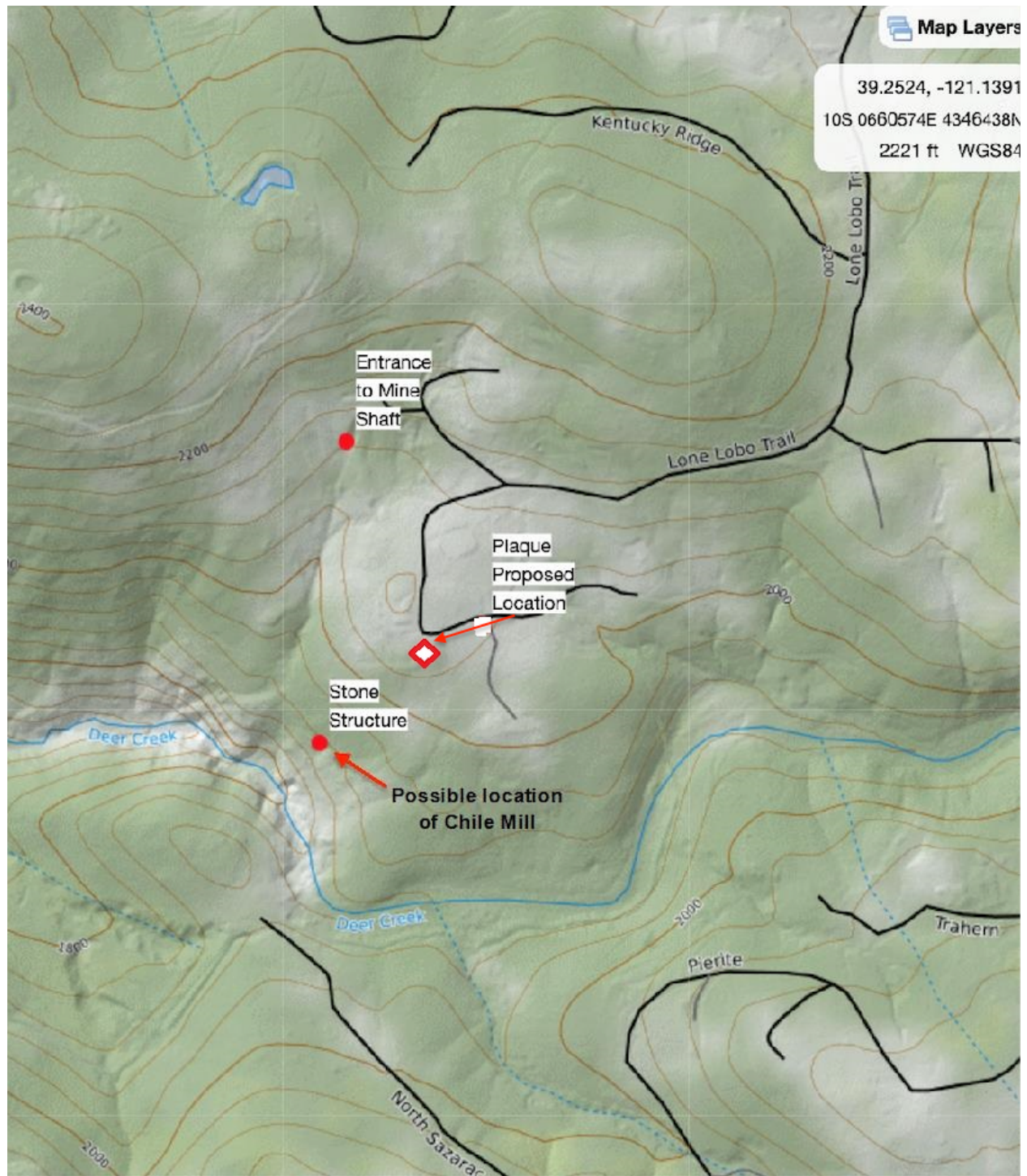
Research has shown that in 1909 a second mine shaft at the Kentucky Ridge Mine, the Lower Tunnel was driven in below the original shaft and intersected that lode below the old workings.⁶

This Nevada County map published in 1913 indicates by the red arrow, the Newtown Ditch ending just above the Kentucky Ridge Mine Company property in section 18. It also indicates by the red arrows the property owned by the mine in 1913, indicated by the broken black lines.

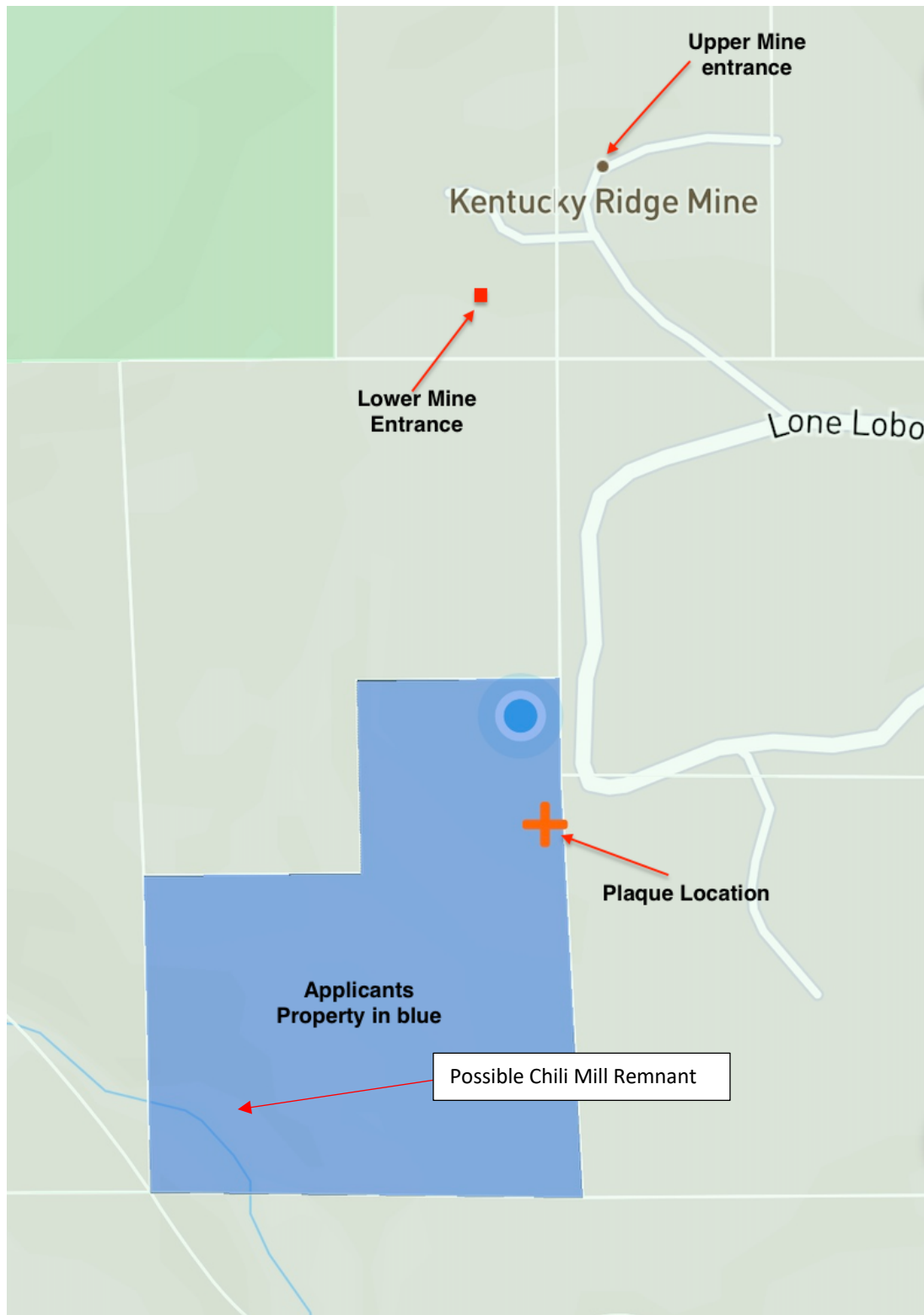
⁶ Mining & Scientific Press page 468, 4-3-1909



Kentucky Mine Main Mine Shaft, Plaque Location and Possible remnants of Chile Mill indicated by Red Dots and Arrows



Plaque location, Craig and Laura Rohrsen property, 10615 Lone Lobo Trail,
Nevada City, CA 95959



Propose location of Kentucky Ridge Mine Plaque

The plaque will be located a few yard east of applicant Craig Rohrsen's residence.



Plaque location

ation from care; solid comfort. But fled in a Philadelphia court. One hot

valdes the Cornstock extends across the had Economy which is parsimonious

SLAVE MINE OF NEVADA COUNTY

BY MATT HAMILTON IN SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE.

THE only mine ever worked by slave labor in Northern California is being reopened. It lies only a few miles west of Grass Valley, the quartz-crowned empress of the Sierra," and for fifty-two years has been known as the Kentucky Ridge. Men speak of fate these days with a knowing meaning. Miners up in these mountains with the great quiet around them believe in it. When they speak of the Kentucky Ridge they never forget to recall the elements of fate which have surrounded it. Fifty-two years ago, owned by a Southern gentleman—a colonel, a slave owner—it again passes into the hands of Southern gentlemen in all that name implies in the soft-spoken land of the magnolia and palmetto.

Strange how time, in revolving in its great circuit, thus brings the ends of the chain together again after all these years! Around the old Kentucky Ridge elings romance enough for a novel, with Geor. as the opening chapter and Nevada country, Cal., as the final scene. All the way from Georgia came Colonel William F. English to seek fortune in the gold fields of California. Fortune, fickle fortune, smiled on his maiden efforts for a time, only to turn her back like an arrant flirt after the novelty of a new lover had worn off. These many years has Colonel English slept quietly in the old graveyard at the head of Broad street, Nevada City, where an almost unknown plot, covered with dry grasses, may be pointed out by a few who know it as the spot purchased by his devoted slaves for the repose of their master.

Away back in 1850 a few rich Southerners in Georgia pooled their interests and decided to send representatives out to "dig gold" in California. Even to this day too many people believe they could do the same thing—if they were in California—with a pick and shovel. Colonel English put his entire fortune into the venture, for the world was gold crazy, since the feverish news had gone flashing abroad of the untold wealth in this unknown land. Selling his plantation, he took with him a number of slaves, and left for Philadelphia to outfit. A steamer was purchased, loaded with supplies, machinery and materials, all ready for the long voyage. History relates the question of California's admission, and until it was definitely decided whether the state should come in free or slave, Colonel English simply waited.

Early in 1851 the voyagers steamed into the harbor of San Francisco, after an uneventful trip around the Horn. Nevada county was the watchword at that particular moment, and fate decided that the colonel should join the rush in that direction. That same year found English and one of his partners, named Gordon, located at the Kentucky Ridge, which had just been struck. It was heralded as fabulously rich, and certainly it bore out the assertion, for a time at least. At the very grass roots the vein was rotten with yellow gold, and into it went the remaining capital of the investors. From the hillside the brush was cleared away and the place assumed the proportions of a busy bee hive. The slaves, who had hitherto toiled in the sunny cotton fields, became miners. Though in a free state, they were still bondmen, but bore their lot uncomplainingly. The new surroundings in this enchanted country, with its green hills, rock-ribbed and pine-clad, ap-

pealed to their childish fancy as a new toy might to a youngster of today. English was a whole-souled man, kind to his black toilers to a marked degree, which accounts for their love for him. The vein was easy of access, being followed by a long tunnel, and the slaves worked merrily away, for gold was plentiful and contentment rested on her wings over the strange scene. A few experienced white miners directed the work, but it is said by the few whose memory goes back to those good old golden days that the Africans performed it.

A mill was necessary. Half a mile distant from the mine, on Deer creek, Colonel English erected what was known as a Chile mill, a very crude affair, with wooden stems, leaky and insecure. After passing beneath the stamps, the ore was further ground by two large wheels revolving in a circular trough. Water from the creek furnished the only motive power. All day long the slaves bearing baskets of ore on their backs came and went. Rich, indeed, must have been the mine to yield returns on such a venture. To-day the idea of carrying ore half a mile on the backs of human beings would be scouted as idiosyncrasy. Two or three tons in twenty-four hours was the utmost the mill could reduce. Then fortune deserted Colonel English, and litigation began. In the end the result was fraught with dire disaster to all concerned. From bad to worse went the property, until the day when the chivalrous Southerner found himself without a cent. He still clung to his slaves, who had each accumulated a little money by doing odd jobs, washing for the generous-hearted miners and similar work. To them had been given the promise of freedom, and but for the fatality which overtook the broken man, this promise would have

been speedily carried out, though the blacks, in their rude cabins, among a strange people, had looked forward to returning to the Southland so dear to their hearts, now that the novelty of the venture had worn off.

The end came in a manner tragic, to say the least. To this day it has been an open question whether the deed was intentional or not. A kindly majority declares that it was accidental. Mounted on his horse, a spirited animal, Colonel English rode away to Coyoteville, just above Nevada City. If you go up that way now you will not find Coyoteville. It has long since disappeared, like many another mining camp once bustling and later deserted. Horse and rider were a striking picture for the man who threw the dice with fate and lost would have attracted attention in any gathering by his proud bearing and distinguished appearance. Clattering up to the store at Coyoteville, the report of a gunshot rang out, and English fell from his horse, dead in the road. The fatal moment had not been observed by the miners about the place, and the report drew their attention to the spot. Some declared the shotgun had accidentally discharged its contents into the man's side, catching in his trappings as he dismounted. Others shook their heads meaningly, for it was known that the man lying dead before them had lost all he possessed on earth and had possibly ended his life, unable to bear up beneath the blow.

The most pathetic and touching scene in the entire story came with the colone's death. His slaves, who might have been free men and women, were broken-hearted over the news. Faithful to the last, they gave up their hard-earned board, their savings and scrapings, that "Mars Kunnel" might be buried with the pomp and ceremony due

him were it back on the old plantation. They followed the body to the grave, mourning like children for a dead parent. The nephew of the dead man assumed ownership of the band of Africans, and to his dishonor and shame, compelled them to buy their freedom by working in the mines.

Gordon, the partner, had gone home, a flood having swept the mill away. He fully intended to return, but resume the Kentucky Ridge, but meanwhile the civil war broke out. With his two sons he entered the Confederate army and fought through the bitter struggle. Seventeen years ago he returned to the scene of his early disaster, but not to mine. He had realized a fortune and came as a sightseer. His first step was toward the grave of his old friend.

Of the released slaves a number settled at Grass Valley, though none are living today. Among them were Mrs. T. J. Sanks, Joseph Thomas and his brother, York, brothers of Mrs. Sanks; Mrs. Ed Mills, John Green and Frances Green, his daughter. Isaac Sanks, son of the first named, resided in Grass Valley since childhood, as has Frank Allen and two sisters, grandchildren of John Green. Allen and Sanks accompanied Company I to Santa Cruz recently as head cooks.

Recently the Kentucky Ridge was purchased by a company of Southern capitalists, represented by Ashley Halsey of South Carolina. Preparations are being made to start up the mine in modern style, and, under methods of today, it is expected to yield rich returns. The old dump, containing the so-called waste rock of the early days, will first be milled. It has lately been carefully looked over and declared by experts valuable enough to yield a good profit under milling methods of today.

WORKED AS SLAVES.

Recent Sale of Property in California Revealed True Condition.

New York Telegram.

The only mine ever worked by slave labor in northern California is being reopened. It lies only a few miles west of Grass valley, and for fifty-two years has been known as the Kentucky Ridge.

Miners in these mountains, when they speak of the Kentucky Ridge, never forget to recall the elements of fate which have surrounded it. Fifty-two years ago it was owned by a Southern gentleman—a colonel, a slave owner. Now it again passes into the hands of Southern gentlemen.

All the way from Georgia came Col. William F. English to seek fortune in the gold fields. A few rich Southerners had pooled their interests and decided to send representatives to "dig gold." Colonel English put his fortune into the venture. Selling his plantation, he took with him several slaves and left for Philadelphia. A steamer was purchased, loaded with supplies, machinery and material, and early in 1851 the voyagers steamed into the harbor of San Francisco, after an uneventful trip around the Horn.

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The nephew of the dead man assumed ownership of the negroes, and, to his shame, compelled them to buy their freedom by working in the mines.

Gordon, the partner, had gone home. He fully intended to return and resume the Kentucky Ridge, but the civil war broke out. With his two sons he entered the confederate army and fought through the war.

Of the released slaves several settled at Grass Valley, but none is living to-day.

Recently the Kentucky Ridge was bought by Southern capitalists, represented by Ashley Halsey, of South Carolina. Preparations are being made to open the mine in modern style. The old dump, containing the waste rock of the early days, will first be milled. It has been carefully looked over and declared by experts valuable enough to yield a good profit under milling methods of to-day.

The Chili Mill is similar to an arrastra with the exception that it does not use heavy stones that are drug, but instead uses one or more large stone wheels.



Illustration is from Hutchings & Rosenfield San Francisco 1858, page 26



Illustration of an 1850s era Mexican arrastra during the California Gold Rush

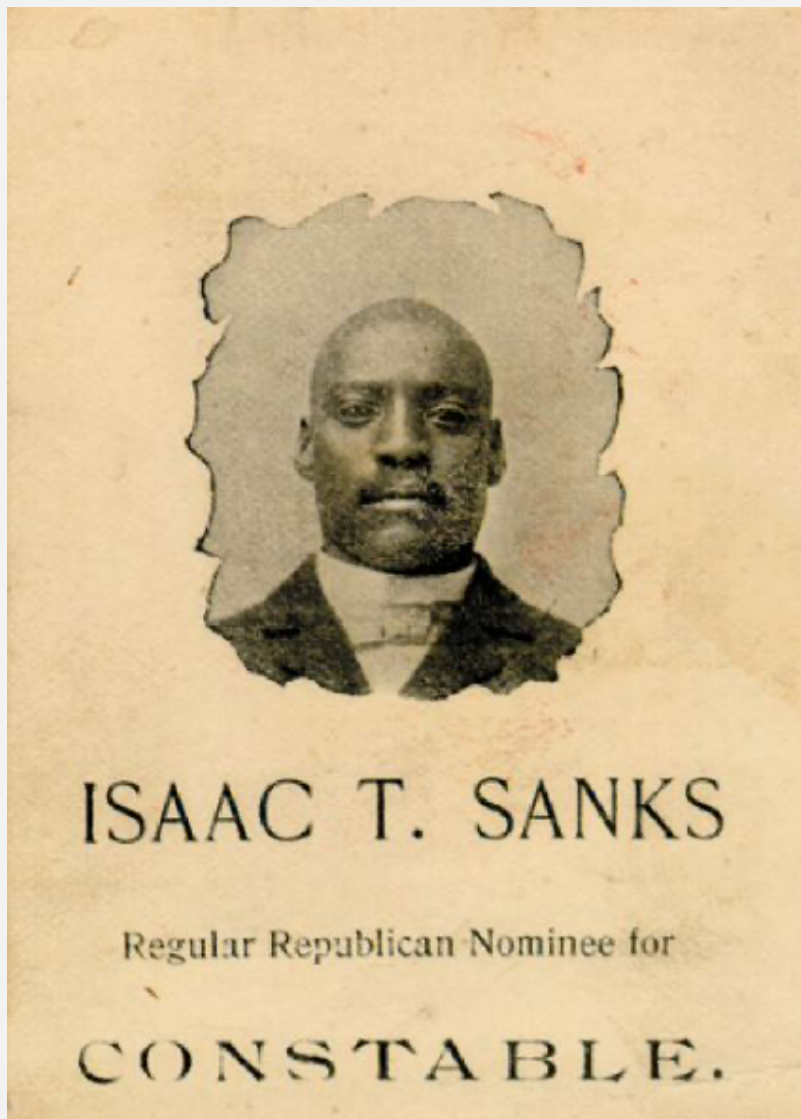
Nevada City Journal 9-3-1852
Death of Colonel William F. English

SAD ACCIDENT.—Col. W. F. English, native of South Carolina, but more recently of Florida, came to his death on Friday about noon, under the following circumstances. He was thrown from his horse while on his way from this city to Kentucky Flat. He had a small gun in his hand, the muzzle of which, in his fall struck him in the breast and discharged the full load into his body, causing instant death. He was a man much esteemed in this region, of fine education and great business activity—generous, impulsive and hospitable.

County had First Black Candidates in State

The Union, February 24, 2002

By Ralph E. Shaffer, professor emeritus in history at Cal Poly Pomona



Isaac T. Sanks was the first black candidate in Nevada County to run on a major party ticket, going for constable as a Republican in the mid-1890s. He was the son of Isaac Sanks, one of the first blacks to run for office in California in 1870.

The approaching statewide primary election (March 5) and this month's commemoration of Black History make this an appropriate time to recall Nevada County's remarkable role in establishment of black suffrage in California in 1870.

The determination of Grass Valley's black community and the county clerk's courage in resisting the state attorney general gave Nevada County the distinction of having the first black candidates for public office in California.

Up until 1870, voting rights in this state were limited to white adult males. Early that year the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution eliminated the racial barrier.

Democrats, controlling the California Legislature and all major state offices, argued that the amendment was illegal on numerous grounds and sought ways to prevent its implementation.

State Attorney General Joseph Hamilton insisted that California law took precedence and instructed county clerks throughout the state to refuse black registration.

He claimed the amendment needed further congressional legislation – establishing penalties for violations – before it became effective. On that grounds, all efforts by blacks to register were turned aside.

Nevada County had the fifth-largest black population in the state, with 165 in 1870. This was primarily the result of a mine established in 1851 by Col. William English, who brought nearly 100 slaves to his Kentucky Ridge claim near Grass Valley.

English's death shortly thereafter ended the operation, and many of his workers settled within the town limits. By 1870 a thriving black community existed in the town and included one of the state's leading campaigners for black civil rights, the Rev. James H. Hubbard.

Perhaps inspired by Hubbard, who spoke in support of black suffrage throughout Northern California, several Grass Valley residents attempted to register in early April. County Clerk J.J. Rogers initially consented and 15 black names went on the voter rolls.

When informed of Attorney General Hamilton's position, Rogers reversed himself and blocked additional registrations.

The letter to Rogers in which Hamilton explained his stand against registration was reprinted throughout the state and generally brought condemnation from editors. Even Democratic editors gradually conceded black suffrage was here, like it or not.

Fortified by a growing support among journalists, and expectation that Congress would shortly pass legislation punishing registrars who disobeyed the amendment, Rogers again reversed his policy, and by mid-April more than 50 blacks had registered in the county.

Grass Valley's black residents were anxious to participate in the town election, scheduled for May 2. Even before Rogers had registered a single black, several papers reported that two Grass Valley blacks were planning to run for local office. They named Isaac Sanks, a 56-year-old Carolinian, and Jacob Sanders, 49, as likely candidates for marshal or town trustee.

Two San Francisco dailies, the Chronicle and Bulletin, picked up the story, which was newsworthy since no other black candidates came forward in the local elections held statewide that same day.

Despite their registration, the Grass Valley election board still refused to put the names of blacks on the local polling lists until certified copies of registration had been received from the county.

As election day neared, Sanks, fearing the first opportunity to vote would pass without blacks' participation, personally went to the clerk's office in Nevada City and obtained proof of registration. On the weekend before the election, the board added the names of the 15 registered blacks residing within the town to the voting lists.

By election day the Grass Valley Union had already announced that Sanders had publicly declared he was not a candidate. Despite that, when the ballots were counted Sanders received four votes for trustee, Sanks two.

While they had the fewest votes of any of the 11 trustee candidates, they won the distinction of being the first black candidates in California history.

Nearly a quarter century later, Isaac Sanks' son would be the official, but losing, Republican nominee for Grass Valley constable, one of the first black candidates on a major party ticket in California.

Ralph E. Shaffer, professor emeritus in history at Cal Poly Pomona

BEAN'S
HISTORY AND DIRECTORY
—OF—
NEVADA COUNTY,
CALIFORNIA.

CONTAINING A COMPLETE HISTORY OF THE COUNTY, WITH
SKETCHES OF THE VARIOUS TOWNS AND MINING
CAMPS, THE NAMES AND OCCUPATION OF
RESIDENTS; ALSO, FULL STATISTICS
OF MINING AND ALL OTHER
INDUSTRIAL RESOURCES.

COMPILED BY EDWIN F. BEAN.

NEVADA.
PRINTED AT THE DAILY GAZETTE BOOK AND JOB OFFICE,
1867.

The following are clips from Edwin F. Beans 1867 Directory

Edwin F. Beans 1867 Directory

I have not sketched the local excitement arising from quartz discoveries, commencing with the discovery on Kentucky Ridge, and continuing on late into '52, when every man, woman and child (what few there were of the two last) rushed furiously after a fortune by "taking up" and recording every seam of white rock, or quartz boulder, visible above ground, as a ledge, and bought stock and paid assessments until every body became, just as the bubble did, flat broke; nor of the quartz epidemic in 1855 and '56, following the discovery in Osceola, when every body again went and did likewise, or rather like-foolish; nor of the repetition of the same old story, now in fact, in 1865 and '66, become a "thrice told tale;" nor of the discovery on Sailor's Flat, and the building of Newtown, in September, 1850; nor of the great Ripple Box Tunnel; nor of the curious mingling of civil authority and lynch law in the hanging of the Indian "Collo" for killing a young man, whose name is forgotten; nor of the terrible affair at Bridgeport, committed by a drunken crowd who tried, (or enacted the farce of a trial,) by a lynch court, and hung an innocent man in March, 1851, on pretense that he was Knowles, a noted Oregon and California horse thief, and concerning those who sat as jurors and officiated actively otherwise, I have been told by one who was present, and afterward noted the facts as they occurred, that not one of them died otherwise than by sudden and violent death, viz: by shot, or stab, or bludgeon, or drowning or cholera, or by fire; nor of the killing of Campbell, by Larue; nor of the murder of Scobey, and our midnight raid, en-masse, horse and foot, to surround and capture his murderers; nor of the scout, by your humble servant as J. P., with a posse comitatus, and capture of Wemah and his beautiful boy "Lulu," to hold as hostages for the surrender of certain murderers of his tribe (nor of the Indian's defeat of another

Edwin F. Beans 1867 Directory

ried on in this township, and although numberless ledges of the same kind, richly charged with sulphurets, and in many instances showing free gold in tempting quantities, interlace the hills in every direction, in no instance as yet has there been established a paying mine. Indeed, the work of prospecting in this vicinity is only in its infancy, consisting mostly of mere prospect shafts—"gopher holes"—and abortive tunnels. In 1851 the **Kentucky** Ridge ledge was struck, by Abel, Porter and others, and a large amount of exceedingly rich specimen-rock was taken out with comparatively small expenditure of labor. A contract was made by them with Colonel Wm. F. English for the erection of what was called, in those days, a quartz mill. This consisted of two large-sized Chile mill wheels and pan, driven by water power, with a capacity of reducing about two or two and a half tons in twenty-four hours. Of course, the affair proved a failure, and was disastrous to all parties concerned. Not only litigation ensued, which stopped the work, but Col. English was found dead on the road between the mill and Nevada, killed by a charge from his own shot-gun, but whether accidentally, or intentionally done by his own hand, was never satisfactorily ascertained. The ledge was finally jumped or relocated in after years, by others, and a small, four-stamp mill, run by water power, is now erected on the premises and occasionally makes a fair clean up on assorted rock from this ledge. It is now owned by Greenbanks and Co.

Isaac Sanks Came to California a Free Man

by Maria E. Brower

BY THE END OF HIS LIFE ISAAC SANKS WAS a respected pioneer "colored man" who, with his wife Chasey, was known by nearly everyone in Grass Valley, where he had lived since 1853. He was a leader in the black community, a Trustee of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and a supporter of the school for black children, built on church property on Church Street.

Although some accounts claim that Isaac Sanks came to California as a slave in 1851, he actually arrived later as a free black man. The confusion comes from 20th-century newspapers that refer to Sanks as one of many slaves Colonel William F. English brought to California to work in the Kentucky Ridge mine on Deer Creek. Some of this incorrect information is based on the obituary of Isaac's only surviving child, Isaac T. Sanks, which said both parents came to Nevada County with English. The truth is that only his mother, Chasey Sanks, and her two brothers did so.

Names of slaves were not included in the passenger list from English's ship, the *Commodore Stockton* when it arrived in San Francisco on April 20, 1851. Although it is possible Colonel English made more than one trip to California, the passenger list for the 1851 voyage includes only 36 unidentified passengers in steerage, far less than the estimated 66-100 slaves he is supposed to have imported.

The story of Isaac Sanks' early life was described by a journalist in the *Pacific Appeal*, an early San Francisco weekly "devoted to the interests of people of color." Sanks was the Grass Valley agent for the *Appeal*, and his story was included in a series of articles that began in May 1863 entitled "Colored Men of California."²

The reporter visited Grass Valley and wrote that the Sanks home was "a neat little cottage on the outskirts of Grass Valley, surrounded by fruit trees, flowers and shrubbery, with a large garden in the rear." The writer, who only signed the articles with the initial "C," said that although Sanks had been born a slave he dreamed that he would not die a slave, and "had heard the voice of freedom singing in his ear."

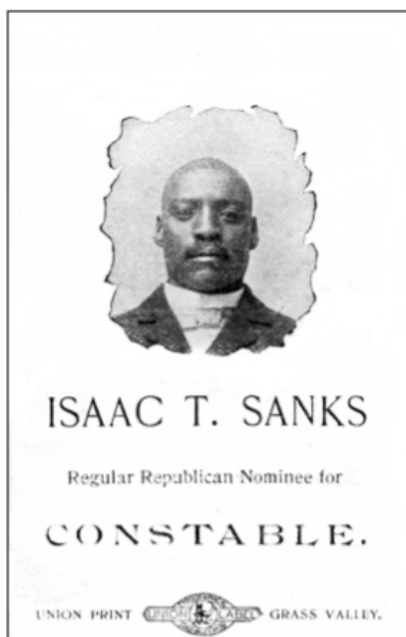
After Chasey and her brothers, Joseph and Jacob Thomas, arrived in Nevada County, they managed to accumulate several hundred dollars through hard work. With it they were able to purchase Chasey's husband from his owner in Florida. Isaac Sanks was then owned

by Charles L. Howe, who had been a neighbor of Col. English on Indian Key, an eleven-acre island off Key West. Howe agreed to give Sanks his freedom for \$600, and (besides giving him an outfit of clothes before he left) presented his former slave with a letter of recommendation to friends in New York along with \$250 to pay his passage to California. It is thus possible that Sanks went to California via New York.

Another source says Sanks already had bought the freedom of his wife Chasey and her brothers with money he earned piloting along the coast of Florida before they repaid him in kind.³

Sanks arrived in California on January 27, 1853, and went directly to Grass Valley, where his wife and his brothers-in-law were living.⁴ Sanks worked as a miner in Rough and Ready for a time after he arrived, and he continued to do so until his own health and that of the mines declined.

In 1855 Sanks became the business partner of Joseph Thomas, his brother-in-law, under the name of Sanks and Thomas, and in that same year suffered a loss of \$1,100 when the town of Grass Valley, burned with a total loss of 250-300 structures. They rebuilt their ice cream parlor and did well for many years until, in 1881 they were burned out again. In addition to the ice cream business,



Sanks worked at other jobs, including as a jobber, and janitor for the Wells, Fargo and Company office.

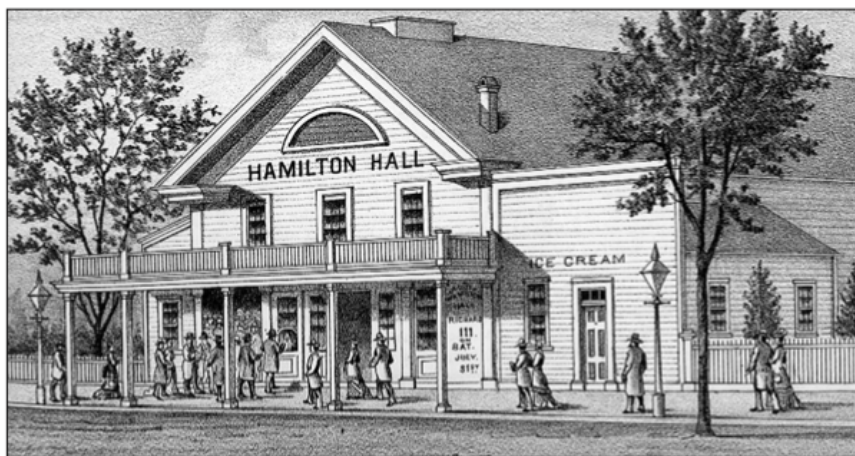
Sanks was a regular contributor to the *Pacific Appeal* newspaper, sending news of Nevada County's black residents and beyond, and in January 1864 he and his friends sent a donation to aid sick and wounded soldiers of the 54th Massachusetts regiment.

Sanks and Chasey had two sons, both born in Grass Valley. The first, named Jacob, died at the age of six on June 25, 1862,⁵ probably of a childhood illness. The second son, Isaac Thomas Sanks, was born in 1858 and lived until 1908.

On January 1, 1869, Isaac Sanks was president of the local Emancipation Day celebration held at Grass Valley. With the fifth-larg-

est black population in California in 1870 (165) "Grass Valley black residents were anxious to participate in the Grass Valley town election, scheduled for May 2nd."⁶ Isaac Sanks and Jacob Sanders were the first blacks in California to declare they were running for office in a local election. Sanders backed out before the election took place, but since his name was on the ballot he received four votes for town trustee. Isaac Sanks only received two votes for town marshal.

The historic events taking place in California must have impressed and given hope to Sanks' twelve-year-old son, Isaac Thomas. Twenty-four years later, young Isaac ran for the office of constable of Grass Valley Township as a Republican. Six months after the death of his father on May 8, 1894, Isaac T. received 150 votes from six Grass Valley precincts. Although he lost the race, he had the distinction of being the first black candidate in California to run on a major party ticket.



The Sanks and Thomas ice cream parlor was next door to the Grass Valley Theater.

(Notes appear on page 8)

Notes for Isaac Sanks story:

1 Lapp, Rudolph M. Blacks in Gold Rush California., (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1977. p.270.

2 *Pacific Appeal* (San Francisco, CA) Colored Men of California No. VIII. Isaac Sanks., Nov. 28, 1863, p.2. California Digital Newspaper Collection. <http://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc>.

3 *The Morning Union* (Grass Valley, CA) Passed Away., Death of Isaac Sanks, Sr., After a Long Illness. May 9, 1894, p2. Doris Foley Library for Historical Research.

4 Nevada County Reunion Register. 1878. Searls Library, Nevada City, CA. This information confirms the *Pacific Appeal* interview which said he arrived in the winter of 1852-53.

5 *Pacific Appeal*. (San Francisco, CA) Died. July 5, 1862, p. 2.

6 Shaffer, Ralph. *The Union* (Grass Valley, CA) County had first black candidates in state. February 25, 2002. p. A2.

Kentucky Ridge Mine: aka Old Slave mine

100 years ago..."Miner Charles Bowen is killed and robbed near the Kentucky Ridge Mine. No suspects." The Union, pg. C-7, 12-1-2007

"Kenyon article-Slave Mine" the Union, pg. 1, 12-10-1939

"3200 feet old ditch reopened" The Union, pg. 3, 6-8-1939

"Old Slave Tunnel ore given tests at Selby" The Union, pg. 3, 3-16-1939

"Runs at Slave Mine disclose profit values" The Union, pg. 4, 8-25-1938

"Kentucky Ridge inspected" The Union, pg. 3, 6-16-1938

"Kentucky Ridge is meeting expectations" The Union, pg. 4, 5-26-1938

"Al Adams to operate old 'Slave Mine' The Union, pg. 4, 3-31-1938

"Chatfield to superintend at Kentucky Ridge" The Union, pg. 7, 7-12-1935

"Slave mine at Kentucky Ridge active" The Union, pg. 3, 5-18-1935

"Kentucky Ridge Mine to operate" (formerly worked by slaves) The Union, pg. 3, 7-21-1934

"Pump, engine theft stops milling test" The Union, pg. 1, 8-19-1934

"Opening of slave mine expedited" The Union, pg. 5, 8-10-1934

"The Oakman company has purchased the 10-stamp mill formerly operated at the **Kentucky Ridge mine**, and expects to have it in commission early in January. The Oakman is situated four miles above Washington and is owned by Massachusetts people. The 1200 ft. adit recently intersected a vein of free-milling ore at a depth of about 600 ft. The vein is 6 ft. wide and assays about \$8 per ton. Frank Dilon is manager of the mine." Mining & Scientific Press, pg. 634, 11-11-1911

"A lower tunnel is being driven at the Kentucky Ridge mine and is in about 75 ft. It is expected to intersect the lode at considerable depth below the old workings." Mining & Scientific Press, pg. 468, 4-3-1909

Nevada County Mining & Business Directory by Poingdestre, 1895, page 168 (Rough & Ready)

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Communications.

For the Pacific Appeal.

MR. EDITOR—Indisposition caused me to suspend awhile my sketches of "Colored Men of California," and believing a trip in the country would tend to recuperate my physical powers, for two months, with staff in hand, and knapsack on my back, I have been a wanderer o'er the land.

During my peregrinations, I saw (incog) many who are representative men; who would shine in any community, and under different and more favorable circumstances, in which they would have had the advantage of culture and education—they would have emblazoned their names on the pages of history, and achieved for themselves fame and fortune. Such a one is the subject of the following brief and imperfect notice with whom I will recommence my sketches of—

COLORED MEN OF CALIFORNIA.

NO. VIII.

Isaac Sanks.

It is not alone among men of scientific attainments, the learned and eloquent that we find fitting representatives of the worth and ability of our race. There are men in the humble walks of life, who are secluded from the public gaze, of retired habits, and averse to notoriety, who claim no higher distinction than that which pertains to being honest men and good citizens, but who well deserve to have their names recorded in these pages. Their names are

friends in New York, gave him \$250 00 to pay his passage to this country.

He arrived in California in the winter of 1852-3, and immediately proceeded to Grass Valley, where Col. English resided, and where Mr. Sanks and his family have since lived, honored and respected by the

His first occupation was mining, which he pursued for several years with varied success, until failing health, and the depreciation of mining claims in that section, induced him to seek other employment. He is now the general jobber for Grass Valley, applying himself to farming, gardening, draying, etc. In fact, he is the most useful man in town. He is noted for his sterling honesty and unvarying truth. His word is never doubted. If Isaac asserts or contradicts anything it is useless for anybody else to say aught against it. His scholastic acquirement are few—slaves are never sent to College. He can barely read and write, with a superficial knowledge of the minor rules of arithmetic, all of which he has acquired since his arrival at years of manhood; but he possesses a strong mind, retentive memory, sound judgment, and a natural aptitude for calculation. These qualities almost balance the deficiencies of his education. He deeply regrets, however, that deficiency, as he is aware it lessens his usefulness, and adds to the many disabilities under which he labors.

Mr. Sanks is a conscientious Christian, and a useful and influential member of the A. M. E. Church. He is an exhorter, and his prayers and exhortations are fervent, and at times eloquent—always clothed in chaste and appropriate language. His complexion is pure black, his features sharp, regular and well defined: he is of medium height, his frame well-knit, lithe.

supple and wiry, denoting strength, activity and muscular power. His Phrenological developments evince veneration, conscientiousness, memory and love of home, with but little ideality. His animal and intellectual propensities are about equally balanced, and are both controlled by a full development of his moral faculties.

Mr. Sanks is now between forty-five and fifty years of age, of nervous temperament and healthy, but not robust constitution. The family are truly patriotic—he has two nephews, sons of Joseph Thomas, in the Union army, and if Company A Colored California Volunteers had have been accepted, either Mr. Sanks or Mr. Thomas would have joined them. He has accumulated some wealth, sufficient perhaps for his moderate desires, but not as much as his friends would wish, nor enough to excite the envy of his foes, if he has any, which I much doubt.

Mr. Sanks is Agent of the PACIFIC APPEAL in Grass Valley, and his short, pithy, terse and epigrammatical communications, in which he notes passing events would do credit to a professional letter-writer.

C.

SAN FRANCISCO, Nov. 3d, 1863.

For the Pacific Appeal.

Literary Crimes.

The cardinal sins known among literary and educated men are plagiarism and interpolation. They are not recognized at common law as crimes: they do not render the perpetrator indictable for libel under any statutory code, nor do they come under the general term "slander," but they are meaner and more despicable than either. They are crimes against the highest art of literature, and he who is guilty of the com-