

State of California - The Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION

APPLICATION FOR REGISTRATION

CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL LANDMARK
(Results in automatic listing in the California Register)

DRAFT

CALIFORNIA POINT OF HISTORICAL INTEREST

NAME OF HISTORIC PROPERTY

Bridgeport Historic District (Update)

ADDRESS

17660 Pleasant Valley Road

CITY/STATE/ZIP CODE

Penn Valley CA 95946

COUNTY

ASSESSOR'S PARCEL NO.

Nevada County

NAME OF OWNER OF HISTORIC PROPERTY

California State Parks, Sierra District

ADDRESS

Marilyn D. Linkem, State Park Superintendent V, 7360 W Lake Boulevard

CITY/STATE/ZIP CODE

Tahoma CA 96142

NAME OF APPLICANT

APPLICANT TELEPHONE NO.

Office of Historic Preservation on behalf of California State Parks

(916) 651-6954

ADDRESS

Kathleen Kennedy, State Historian II, Archaeology, History & Museums, 1416 9th Street, Suite 902

CITY/STATE/ZIP CODE

Sacramento CA 95814-5510

RECOMMENDED BY CHAIR, STATE HISTORICAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

DATE

APPROVED BY DIRECTOR, CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

DATE

DESIGNATION NO.

California Historical Landmark #0390



PRIMARY RECORD

*P1. Resource Name or #: Bridgeport Historic District (UPDATE)

Page 1 of 23 Other Identifier: Bridgeport; Bridgeport Covered Bridge

*P2. Location: Unrestricted

*a. County Nevada

*b. USGS 7.5' Quad French Corral Date T 17N; R 8E of of Sec 33; B.M.

c. Address 17660 Pleasant Valley Road City Penn Valley Zip 95946

d. UTM: (Give more than one for large and/or linear resources)
10/655850 4349750; 10/655850 4349450; 10/655630 4349450; 10/655620 4349740

e. Other Locational Data: (e.g., parcel #, directions to resource, elevation, etc., as appropriate)

*P3a. Description: (Describe resource and its major elements. Include design, materials, condition, alterations, size, setting, and boundaries):

Bridgeport Historic District contains a portion of the original Virginia Turnpike and the associated historic Bridgeport Covered Bridge where tolls were collected for the use of the turnpike. Significant other resources include the Kneebone Family Cemetery and a large nineteenth century Dutch barn. The barn was used to house and feed large wagon teams transiting the Virginia Turnpike as well as provide a facility for repair of those wagons. The cemetery is well maintained as is the barn. There is also a gas station, opened in 1927, restored to its original appearance. The portion of the Turnpike in the district follows the original route and the rock walls are of original construction. The district also includes remnants of other buildings and structures of the Thompson/Cole/Kneebone Ranch. The barn contains conserved wagons and carriages of the historic period of the Virginia Turnpike and the agricultural industry.

The district is at the west end of South Yuba River State Park consisting of approximately 30 scenic, relatively wild, and fairly level acres. The district is located on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada, in the Sacramento River basin. There are areas that were once cleared for pasturage. Otherwise the district is wooded with native trees and bushes especially along the river and creek banks. It is within the South Yuba River Canyon with the South Yuba River passing through. The headwaters of the South Yuba River start at 7,190 feet in Nevada County and form a river that is 102 km (63 mi.) long. Bridgeport is near the confluence of the South Yuba River and the Yuba River at Englebright Reservoir. The district is relatively flat with elevations of 550 to 600 ft. The river is wide and relatively shallow through the district except in flood conditions. North and south of the district the hills rise steeply. The river and creek banks support oak, cottonwood, chaparral, red bud, and native grasses as well as non-native invasive plants such as star thistle, blackberry, and scotch broom.

Bridgeport Historic District is defined as that portion of the South Yuba River State Park bounded by Pleasant Valley Road, Kentucky Creek to its confluence with the South Yuba River, thence directly north to the Point Defiance Trail, east along the Point Defiance Trail to the north side of the original Virginia Turnpike to the intersection with Pleasant Valley Road. Boundaries were selected to capture the key historic features of the Bridgeport Historic District including the Kneebone Ranch area, the Kneebone Family Cemetery, the Bridgeport Covered Bridge, a portion of the original Virginia Turnpike, and the historic barn.

P3b. Resource Attributes: (List attributes and codes)

*P4. Resources Present: Covered Bridge (National Register-listed), Barn, Gas Station, Greenhouse Foundation, Watering Trough, Dairy Barn and Tack Shed Foundations, Turnpike and Turnpike Walls, Cemetery, and Generator House/Creamery Separator

P5. Photos: begin on page 11.

*P6. Date Constructed/Age and Source: Historic:

Bridge, 1862 per National Register of Historic Places nomination form, 1970

Barn, circa 1862, per draft National Register district nomination form 2012

Gas Station, 1927, per draft National Register district nomination form 2012

Section of Virginia Turnpike, 1856, per draft National Register district nomination form 2012

Kneebone Family Cemetery, earliest burial 1853, per draft National Register district nomination form 2012

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P3a. Description (continued)

Covered Bridge

The bridge was designated California Historical Landmark No. 390 August 26, 1947, designated a National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark in 1970,¹ and listed in the National Register of Historic Places July 14, 1971. This single span, wooden covered bridge crosses the South Fork of the Yuba River in the northeast portion of the district (Photos 1 and 2). It features a unique combination of a Howe truss and Burr arch design. The Burr arch may have been taken in part from plans or designs prepared in 1806 by Theodore Burr for a bridge across the Hudson River. David Wood incorporated the Howe truss, patented in 1840 by William Howe, that used iron rods to greatly strengthen the truss. Wood is said to have been inspired by the strength of railroad bridges of the East coast that began to incorporate iron into the wood truss construction originally used to support railroad spans.

The truss, arch and flooring are built from Douglas fir and the structure is protected by 27,000 shingles (each 5 to 6 inches wide by 36 inches long) made from sugar pine. It is covered to protect the bridge from the weather that would cause the wood to rot if not protected. Originally 251 feet long, the bridge became 229 feet long after removal of the weather wings at each end in 1972. The bridge is considered to be the longest single span wooden covered bridge in the United States.²

There are three openings in each wall providing spectacular views of the river upstream and downstream. The bridge was built by David Wood in the summer of 1862 to replace his bridges at Bridgeport and Point Defiance that were washed away by the winter storm of 1861-62. It began paying between \$4000 and \$5000 per month in toll fees, an incredible amount for that time. The bridge was later restored and raised in 1971-72. The weather wings were removed, reducing the length by 22 feet. On June 28, 1972, Nevada County declared the bridge unsafe for vehicular traffic, and ended its role as a transportation resource.³ Pedestrians were free to cross the river on the bridge until 2011 when it was closed pending structural investigation and repair. Warped timbers have caused the bridge to shift and twist. Emergency stabilization measures are underway in 2014.

Barn

200 feet south of the bridge is the entrance to the large, nineteenth century, drive-through, classic Dutch style barn where teamsters and travelers could perform or obtain repairs for wagons, feed stock, and rest (Photos 4, 5, and 6). The barn was built in the same period as the bridge, using similar materials, and with similar construction technique.⁴ The barn may have been built by Charles Cole or the result of a partnership between Charles Cole and David Wood in the early 1860s. The barn features an intact Jackson hayfork on a rail to hoist and store hay in the large hayloft (Photo 7).

The barn covers 6120 square feet and is approximately 40 feet at its peak. It is divided into three main sections. The westernmost was used as a bay that teams and wagons could pass directly through from either end and rejoin the Turnpike after stopping for maintenance or repairs and to feed the teams. The middle section was used to stable working team livestock and the easternmost used for smaller livestock such as sheep and pigs. By 1927 the barn was used primarily for storage and in 1966, the word Ponderosa was painted on the south face and east roof slope. In 2000 the metal roof and Ponderosa sign were replaced with shingles as originally designed and built. The barn was repainted in 2011.

Gas station

75 feet south along the Turnpike is the restored Shell gas station that operated from 1927 to 1944 (Photo 9). It served travelers transiting the Turnpike or visiting the Kneebone Beach Resort upriver. Gasoline was 12 cents per gallon in 1927. The gas station featured a portico to cover the refueling area, a gravity-fed "Visible" gas pump,

¹ National Park Service, Historic American Engineering Record, HAER CA-41, 1985.

² Scenic USA, Bridgeport and Blenheim Bridges, www.scenicusa.net/083111.html.

³ Nevada County, Judgment OR 691-621, June 28, 1972.

⁴ Charles J. Cole, California Homestead Application, BK 1-195, listing ranch, house, and barn.

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a repair bay, and a small store to sell camping supplies and meats and produce from the Kneebone ranch.⁵

Alongside the building was a garage. Since Alfred did not work on cars he used this area for storage. Attached at the back of the gas station are the remains of the meat dressing room and ice-box. Meat-producing animals raised on the ranch were hung and dressed here using running water in a trough in the room. Meat was stored in the ice-box built into the earth behind and preserved by ice cut in the winter. Between the front store and the butcher shop was a retort unit used to separate gold from mercury. Alfred paid \$18.20 per ounce for gold and received \$20.70 per ounce in town. He also traded sides of beef and pork for gold with snipers mining abandoned claims.

The South Yuba River Park Association restored the gas station to its circa 1927 appearance (Figure 1). A vintage "Visible" gas pump was obtained, restored, and placed with the gas station. Around the gas station are mulberry trees, planted by Mary Ann Thompson Cole (1831-1900), widow of William Thompson and wife of Charles Cole. Mrs. Cole tried to raise silkworms, which thrive on mulberry leaves. She hoped to profit from the popularity of silk fabrics in the nineteenth century. Her venture was unsuccessful.

Greenhouse foundation

Near the gas station are the remains of a greenhouse (Photo 10) that was built in 1956 by owners of the ranch at that time, Mr. and Mrs. Harrison, to grow orchids for sale.

Watering trough

Between the barn and the gas station on the west side of the turnpike is the concrete watering trough (Photo 11) built in 1920 by Alfred Kneebone for his horses and those of passing wagons. A sign painted on the end of the trough by Alfred stated "Bridgeport, elevation 566 feet, population 7." Signs painted on the side of the trough, no longer visible, advertised the Kneebone Beach Resort and later, the Shell gas station.

Dairy barn and tack shed/granary foundations

Across from the barn on the east side of the turnpike are foundations remaining from a smaller barn that housed milk cows and later smaller livestock. A small house adjacent to the barn may have been used as a granary or tack shed (Photo 12).

Turnpike and Turnpike Walls

The key to the development of the Bridgeport Historic District was the creation of the Virginia Turnpike. In April of 1851, Nevada County was split from Yuba County and in 1853 the State Legislature passed an act to authorize the formation of corporations for the construction of plank or turnpike roads. In 1856, David I. Wood, who lived at Point Defiance, and eleven investors organized the Virginia Turnpike Company, allowing them to build a toll road from the Anthony House on Deer Creek (now under Lake Wildwood) to French Corral and on to North San Juan. In the late 1850s and early 1860s, the Virginia Turnpike was one of the key routes along with the Placerville route for the transportation of supplies moving from the San Francisco Bay area to the California gold fields and the Nevada silver fields. Up to 100 wagons per day transited the turnpike during this period. Stages were forced to travel at night due to the huge amount of supply traffic during the day. At some times, the day traffic reached the point that teams were lined up, one behind the other, waiting for traffic in the opposite direction to pass.

In 1869, with the completion of the cross country railroad, the vast majority of commerce shifted to the railroad and brought to an end the period of bridge/toll road builders and their profits. In 1901, no longer profitable, the Virginia Turnpike Company was dissolved and taken over by the County of Nevada. The turnpike was made a public road with no tolls charged.

The best preserved example of the historic Virginia Turnpike can be found at Bridgeport. Here, a portion of the road from Marysville over the Hennes Pass to the Comstock Lode in the State of Nevada, crossed the

⁵ Alfrieda Kneebone Knowlton, Interview, April, 5, 1996; Lucille Kneebone Brandt, Interview, July 8, 1990, SYRSP Archives.

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Bridgeport covered wooden bridge. The remains of massive dry set stone walls still line the roadway through Bridgeport on both sides of the river. Contained within the Bridgeport Historic District are 0.4 miles of the original turnpike originating at Pleasant Valley Road at the east end and terminating again at Pleasant Valley road beyond the bridge at the west end. It is thirty feet wide, unpaved, and level. Lining the sides of the turnpike in most areas are stone walls (Photos 13 and 14) built by ranchers aided by European and Chinese laborers to contain livestock and to mark the toll road leading to Wood's bridge.

Cemetery

Near the western end of the turnpike next to Kentucky Creek is the Kneebone Family Cemetery (Photos 15 and 16). Although it lies within South Yuba River State Park boundaries, it is owned by the Nevada County Cemetery District and maintained by the descendants of the Kneebone family. The cemetery contains twelve graves of people central to the history of Bridgeport.

Grave Site #1: Captain William Burdette Thompson (1809-1853), a ship captain, left his ship in San Francisco Bay in 1849 and came to the Bridgeport area with his wife Mary Ann Thompson and their daughter Fannie. Captain Thompson died of an unknown illness at the age of 44 years.

Grave Site #2: Fannie Thompson (1850-1856), only daughter of William and Mary Ann Thompson. The cause of death is unknown.

Grave Site #3: Mary Ann Russell Thompson Cole (1818-1900), widow of William B. Thompson and wife of Charles J. Cole. The Coles owned a farm at Bridgeport and collected tolls at the covered bridge. They had three daughters and a son.

Grave Site #4: Charles Jordan Cole (1831-1916) arrived in the Bridgeport area in early 1850. He married the widow of William Thompson at Thompson's request before he died. Charles homesteaded 160 acres in 1861 and built the Bridgeport House, a stage and wagon stop, in 1862.

Grave Sites #5 & #6: Eugene Joseph Kneebone (1916-1984) and Mary E Washburn Kneebone (1915-1984). Grandson of Victoria Cole and Andrew Kneebone, brother of Milton Kneebone, Eugene was born in San Francisco, lived in Spenceville, and became a mining engineer. He and his wife Mary were interned in a Japanese prison camp in the Philippines during WWII. After the war, they returned to Grass Valley. Eugene worked as a mining engineer at the Idaho-Maryland mine in Grass Valley. His wife Mary followed him in death only six months later.

Grave Site #7: Andrew Reed Kneebone (1860-1934). Born in Cornwall, England, he joined his family in Spenceville in 1876 after completing his education. Andrew learned teamstering from his father, becoming one of the finest and best known teamsters in the Gold Country. He married Victoria Cole in 1887 and they had five sons between 1888 and 1897. After Victoria's death in 1930, Andrew moved to Bridgeport. He inherited one-third of the Bridgeport Ranch and his four living sons each received one-sixth shares.

Grave Site #8: Victoria Marie Cole Kneebone (1862-1930). Victoria was born at Bridgeport, the youngest of the three Cole daughters. She married Andrew Reed Kneebone in 1887 in Marysville and lived at Andrew's Spenceville ranch. Although Cole's estate was divided amongst his children upon his death in 1916, by 1921 Victoria's siblings had deeded their shares to her to reunite the estate.

Grave Site #9: William H. Kneebone (1897-1918). The youngest son of Andrew and Victoria and born in Spenceville, William died at age 21 in San Diego. The probable cause was pneumonia. William was the only son of Andrew and Victoria to be buried at Bridgeport.

Grave Site #10: Gideon Hand Graves (c.1831-1900). Graves and Charles J. Cole obtained a 40-acre General Land Patent for placer mining in 1888. Graves was toll-taker at the bridge from 1876 to 1899 and

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granted Cole his share of the placer mining patent for his care, shelter, and maintenance.

Grave Sites #11 & #12: Milton E. Kneebone (1916-1991) and Lucille Kneebone (1918-2011). Grandson of Andrew and Victoria, brother of Eugene, Milton was born in Grass Valley, attended school in Spenceville, and spent summers at Bridgeport helping at the swim resort. Lucille was born in Bridgeport and lived there until the early 1940s. Lucille Caroline Jareske Kneebone (1918-2011), born to Joseph and Katherine (Lesiak) Jareske, married Milton E. Kneebone November 11, 1943 in Los Angeles, California.

Visitor Center

After fire destroyed Charles Cole's Bridgeport House in 1919, the Kneebone Ranch House was constructed on the site circa 1924, incorporating the cellar of the 1862 building. According to Lucile Kneebone Brandt, the Kneebone House burned down in the 1950s or 1960s, and in the early 1960s a new house was constructed approximately 80 feet northeast of the surviving cellar. The cellar was converted into a septic tank.⁶ The existing building, referred to as the Caretaker's House by Ms. Brandt, is now known as the Visitor Center (Photo 17) and serves as a Park Store, Museum, and Park Ranger Headquarters.

Generator House/Creamery Separator

A small building (Photo 18) a few yards north of the Visitor Center predated the Caretaker's House by several years. The generator was made by the Kohler Corporation and was simply called the "Kohler." The rear part of the building was used for washing out milk cans and preparing the milk and cream.

***P7. Owner and Address:**

Marilyn D. Linkem, State Park Superintendent V
California State Parks, Sierra District
7360 W Lake Boulevard, Tahoma, CA 96142

***P8. Recorded by:** (Name, affiliation, and address)

Content from California Historical Landmark and National Register of Historic Places nominations, collections statement, and cultural resource inventory, consolidated, edited, and formatted for DPR 523 forms by Amy H. Crain, State Historian II, California State Office of Historic Preservation, 1725 23rd Street, Suite 100, Sacramento, CA 95816-7100; with assistance from Kathleen Kennedy, State Historian II, California State Parks, Archaeology, History & Museums Division, 1416 Ninth Street, Room 902, Sacramento, CA 94296-0001 and Denise Jaffke, Associate State Archaeologist, California State Parks, Sierra District, 7360 W Lake Boulevard, Tahoma, CA 96142.

***P9. Date Recorded:** 1947, 1970, 1996, 2007, 2012, 2014

***P10. Survey Type:** (Describe) California Historical Landmark

***P11. Report Citation:** (Cite survey report and other sources, or enter "none.")

California Historical Landmark nomination for Bridgeport (Nyes Crossing) Covered Bridge, CHL #390, 1947

National Register of Historic Places nomination for Bridgeport Covered Bridge, 1970

A Partial Cultural Resource Inventory of the South Yuba River Project, draft copy, June 1996

South Yuba River State Park Scope of Collections Statement, 2007

National Register of Historic Places draft nomination for Bridgeport Historic District, 2012

National Historic Landmark draft Covered Bridges NHL Context Study, 2012

South Yuba River State Park Association Cultural History Archive, varied

***Attachments:**

Location Maps Continuation Sheets Building, Structure, and Object Record Photograph Record Other (List):

⁶ Philip Hines, *A Partial Cultural Resource Inventory of the South Yuba River Project*, California State Department of Parks & Recreation, June 30, 1996.

BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

Page 6 of 23 *NRHP Status Code 1 *Resource Name or # (Assigned by recorder) Bridgeport Historic District (UPDATE)

- B1. Historic Name: Bridgeport
 B2. Common Name: Bridgeport
 B3. Original Use: vehicular toll bridge; resources associated with toll road; Thompson/Cole/Kneebone family ranch
 B4. Present Use: pedestrian bridge
 *B5. Architectural Style: Howe truss and Burr arch design
 *B6. Construction History: (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations)
 Cemetery (1853), Section of Virginia Turnpike (1856), Bridge (1862), Barn (c. 1862), Gas Station (1927)
 *B7. Moved? No Date: N/A Original Location: N/A
 *B8. Related Features: N/A
 B9a. Bridge Architect: David I. Wood b. Builders: Unknown
 *B10. Significance: Theme Gold and silver mining Area Sierra Nevada
 Period of Significance 1849 to 1972 Property Type _____
 Applicable Criteria CHL-1: Only property of its type and time period in California

Bridgeport Historic District is an update to California Historical Landmark No. 390 registered August, 1947. The landmark recognized the unique combination truss and arch construction of the Bridgeport Covered Bridge and its role as the longest single span wooden covered bridge in the United States. The nomination and landmark are updated to recognize the significance of other resources in the district, including the associated Virginia Turnpike, the 1862 barn, the 1927 gas station, and the Kneebone Family Cemetery.

Driven by the discovery and pursuit of gold in the Sierra Nevada foothills, Bridgeport provided the means for men to reach the placer and hydraulic mines that flooded the area and to transport supplies and materials to meet their needs. It became even more critical with the discovery of silver and gold in the areas around Virginia City, Nevada and the need to connect them to the shipping available in Marysville, California. The resulting construction of the Virginia Turnpike, the covered wooden bridge at Bridgeport, the barn, and the associated ranch provided a necessary lifeline across the Sierra Nevada. Even after the completion of the transcontinental railroad, the importance of Bridgeport for vehicular transportation lasted until the bridge was closed as a public thoroughfare in 1972 and replaced by the Pleasant Valley Road Bridge built by the County of Nevada.

Significant people associated with the Bridgeport Historic District include William Thompson, a sea captain who established the ranch at Bridgeport in 1849 after his crew deserted his ship at San Francisco in pursuit of gold. Following Captain Thompson, the ranch was owned by Charles Cole who married Thompson's widow, then Andrew Kneebone, married to Cole's daughter Victoria, and Alfred Kneebone, one of Victoria and Andrew's five sons. David I. Wood founded the fourteen mile long Virginia Turnpike and built the covered bridge with lumber from his own mill.

Significant Dates

- 1849: Thompson established ranch
 1853: first burial in family cemetery
 1856: establishment of Virginia Turnpike toll road
 1862: construction of Bridgeport Covered Bridge
 1927: gas station built
 1972: closed to vehicle access

In 1948, Columbia Parlor No. 70, Native Daughters of the Golden West of French Corral, California dedicated a plaque on the north side of the bridge. In 1964, the original California Historical Landmark plaque was placed on the south side of the bridge by the California State Park Commission in cooperation with the Nevada County Historical Society and the Wm. B. Meek – Wm. M. Stewart Chapter No. 10 E Clampus Vitus. In 1970, the bridge was designated a National Civil Engineering Landmark with a plaque placed by the American Society of Civil Engineers alongside the California Historical Landmark plaque. In 1971, the bridge was listed in the National Register of Historic Places. In 1973, The California State Society Daughters of the American Colonists identified the bridge as "Wood's Crossing" and dedicated their plaque on the south side of the bridge to "those pioneer Americans who came to California in search of a new life and passed this way to establish their homes in the northern mine country."

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B10. Significance (continued)

Significant Dates

- 1849 William B. Thompson arrived at Bridgeport and started ranch
- 1851 David I. Wood arrived, purchased two bridges
- 1856 Virginia Turnpike Company formed and Turnpike designed
- 1859 Silver discovered in Virginia City, silver rush began
- 1862 Bridges at Point Defiance and Bridgeport washed away
- 1862 Bridgeport covered wooden bridge and barn built
- 1862 Charles J. Cole built the Bridgeport House/Hotel
- 1869 Transcontinental railroad completed
- 1919 Bridgeport House/Hotel destroyed by fire
- 1901 Nevada County took over the Virginia Turnpike
- 1972 Bridge closed to vehicle access

The 1947 California Historical Landmark nomination for the Bridgeport Covered Bridge documented the significance of the bridge alone. In 1970 the bridge was designated a National Civil Engineering Landmark and in 1971 listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The California Historical Landmark nomination is now updated to recognize the significance of additional resources in the district, including the associated Virginia Turnpike, the 1862 barn, the 1927 gas station, and the Kneebone Family Cemetery.

Prehistory

The presence of the Native American Nisenan people in the Bridgeport area is documented and evidenced by their grinding rocks used to grind acorns for food and midden mounds, the debris of human activity.⁷ The Nisenan were known for their expert basket weaving. Future discoveries of the Nisenan culture and artifacts are probable in the district. They were hunter-gatherers and the land provided them with free running water, plentiful game and plant foods, and the basic materials needed to create homes, tools, and the finely crafted baskets. Nisenan descendants are still present in the area.⁸

History

June 2, 1848 Jonas Spect discovered gold at Rose's Bar, just downstream from Bridgeport.⁹ By 1850 the area swarmed with more than 2,000 miners. European contact brought a halt to the well-established Nisenan way of life. With the discovery of gold came devastating diseases and loss of traditional resources. Settlers seeking land for grazing and lumber for construction simply took over the available resources. In the process they polluted the river with mining debris and cut down many trees including the oaks that provided food and shelter materials for the Nisenan. Jonas Spect's discovery started the Gold Rush along the South Yuba River, leading to the need for transport of supplies, goods, gold, silver, and support for the teams and vehicles.¹⁰ The Bridgeport Historic District continued as a center for transportation through closure of the bridge to public transport in 1972.

By 1850 Bridgeport was a mining camp, stage stop, and ranch. The history of Bridgeport as a working ranch began when William B. Thompson, a sea captain, arrived at Bridgeport in 1849 after his crew abandoned ship in San Francisco for the gold fields.¹¹ He had married Mary Ann Russell in England in 1843 and together they started the ranch in 1850.¹² The ranching enterprise continued until 1973.

⁷ Philip Hines, *A Partial Cultural Resource Inventory of the South Yuba River Project*, California State Department of Parks & Recreation, June 30, 1996.

⁸ Nevada City Rancheria, Nevada County Indigenous Tribe, www.nevadacityrancheria.org.

⁹ Fowler Family Archives, *Our Thomson Line*, transcribed by Anabel Fowler, 5-6.

¹⁰ Thompson & West, *History of Yuba County California*, 1879, Chapter X.

¹¹ John Tamagni, *The Thompson Family*, SYRPA,

<http://southyubariverstatepark.org/Documents/Cultural%20History/Park%20Chron%20History/Tamagni%20Outline.pdf>

¹² England General Register Office, Marriage Certificate copy, March 4, 1843.

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The discovery of gold in the Sierra Nevada foothills was a major event in the history of the nation and even more so for the newly formed state of California. The huge influx of people from all over the world with high expectations of wealth from gold and the growth of commerce and transportation necessary to support the eager gold rush miners changed the state forever. In most cases those that did obtain great wealth were not seeking gold but providing goods, services, and entertainment. The Bridgeport Historic District is an excellent example of that support. Although there were gold mining claims surrounding the Bridgeport Historic District, its benefit was in the provision of food, livestock, and more importantly, the ability to transport goods and services to the area mining towns such as French Corral, Nevada City, and Centerville, later called Grass Valley, as well as later to the larger consolidated mining operations at Malakoff Diggins and the silver mines of Nevada's Comstock Lode.

With gold rush activity on both sides of the river, safe crossings were vital. Ferries came first, made by overturning wagons and connecting them to form barges, or by refitting wagons to travel across water. Brothers Urias and Emanuel Nye operated a ferry service across the South Yuba River.¹³ It is believed the name Bridgeport came from a ford located near the present site of the covered wooden bridge. In 1850 Virginian David Wood settled his family near the South Fork of the Yuba River. He also established a sawmill at Forest City and a store at French Corral.¹⁴

In 1853 the State legislature passed "an act to authorize the formation of corporations for the construction of plank or turnpike roads."¹⁵ David Wood purchased the Sparks Bridge at Bridgeport in August 1855, possibly in anticipation of the future route of the Virginia Turnpike over the South Yuba River.¹⁶ In 1856, David Wood and eleven investors organized the Virginia Turnpike Company allowing them to build a toll road in Nevada County.¹⁷ The turnpike ran from the Anthony House on Deer Creek (now underwater in Lake Wildwood) to North San Juan and was fourteen miles long. The existence of the facilities and the turnpike at Bridgeport ensured the flow of men and materials across the Sierra Nevada. This along with access to the easier Sierra transit provided by the Henness Pass ensured the growth of the economy throughout the region. The turnpike was extremely profitable, often seeing the transit for 100 teams a day. Many of these teams consisted of two or three heavy freight wagons pulled by teams of sixteen horses and mules.

Flooding during the winter of 1861-62 destroyed five bridges across the South Yuba River and throughout the Sierra Nevada river drainages.¹⁸ This included two of David Wood's bridges, the Sparks Bridge at Bridgeport and another near Point Defiance.¹⁹ In 1862 Wood oversaw the construction of the Bridgeport Covered Bridge to replace the washed out Sparks bridge. The new bridge was built with Douglas fir trusses and arches plus wrought iron rods and was covered in sugar pine shakes. The bridge is of a unique construction, consisting of a Howe truss, patented in 1840, and Burr arch believed to be modeled after a Burr truss design, invented in 1806 and the basis of many bridges built in the East as early as 1842.²⁰

In 1853 William Thompson died, and was the first to be buried in what became known as the Kneebone Family Cemetery. Charles Cole, a friend and employee of William Thompson, married Thompson's widow Mary Ann in 1854, by prior agreement with William.

¹³ James Miller Guinn, *History of the State of California and Biographical Record of the Sacramento Valley California*, 1906, 935.

¹⁴ Fowler Family Archives, Our Thomson Line, transcribed by Anabel Fowler, 5-6.

¹⁵ California State Legislature, An Act to Authorize the Formation of Corporations for the Construction of Plank or Turnpike Roads, May 12, 1853.

¹⁶ Thomas P. Hess to David I. Wood, Bill of Sale, August 14, 1855, South Yuba River State Park (SYRSP) Archives.

¹⁷ Nevada County Recorder, Book of Corporations, BK 1, January 25, 1856, 9-14.

¹⁸ *Nevada Democrat*, Nevada City, Dec. 30, 1861 & Jan. 14, 1862.

¹⁹ Fowler Family Archives, Miscellaneous Notes & Letters transcribed by Belle Fagg Fowler, 2.

²⁰ National Park Service, Historic American Engineering Record, HAER CA-41, 1985.

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Recognizing the profitability of providing lodging for the mining men, teamsters, and travelers using the Virginia Turnpike, Cole built and operated the Bridgeport House/Hotel on the Cole Ranch starting in 1862.²¹ Also the family home, the house included nineteen rooms and was built of sugar pine throughout. It was widely known and popular, especially during the hydraulic mining days. The roadhouse operated successfully until August 19, 1919 when it burned to the ground.²² The cause of the fire is unknown.

In 1866, David Wood lost the turnpike and the bridge in a sheriff's sale.²³ Control and ownership of the Virginia Turnpike and Bridge transferred to Samuel Wood, David Wood's son, in 1873. In January of 1900 Samuel Wood renewed his license to charge tolls for one more year. Ownership remained with Samuel Wood until the turnpike and bridge were taken over by the County of Nevada in 1901 and maintained for use as a public highway.²⁴ With the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, the importance of the Virginia Turnpike was diminished and was used primarily for support of local commerce and mines.

Mary Ann and Charles Cole had three daughters, one of whom, Victoria Maria, remained at Bridgeport. In 1886 Victoria married Andrew Reed Kneebone, an expert, respected, and widely known teamster. He was famous for his ability to maneuver large teams intricately with multiple wagons in tight quarters using the "jerk line" method of control.²⁵ Grandson Alfred Kneebone inherited the ranch in 1916 upon Charles Cole's death.

In 1927, Alfred established and operated the Bridgeport Swim Resort, taking advantage of a beautiful natural swimming area about 1/4 mile upstream of the ranch. The resort had a dance pavilion, five changing rooms, and five small cabins.²⁶ Alfred also built and operated a Shell gas station and small store to serve the automobile traffic coming to the resort.²⁷ The resort operated from 1927 to 1944. In the early 1930s illegal upstream hydraulic mining tailings fouled the swim hole and restricted the resort operation until the issue was resolved in court.²⁸ Alfred died in 1945 and his wife moved to Grass Valley and leased out the ranch. Eventually the ranch was sold and passed through several owners including Nevada County in 1972 before becoming state park property in 1986.

B11. Additional Resource Attributes: (List attributes and codes) N/A

*B12. References:

California Historical Landmark nomination for Bridgeport Covered Bridge, CHL #390, 1947

National Register of Historic Places nomination for Bridgeport Covered Bridge, 1970

A Partial Cultural Resource Inventory of the South Yuba River Project, draft copy, June 1996

South Yuba River State Park Scope of Collections Statement, 2007

National Register of Historic Places draft nomination for Bridgeport Historic District, 2012

National Historic Landmark draft Covered Bridges NHL Context Study, 2012

South Yuba River State Park Association Cultural History Archive, varied

Anderson, David G. *Bridgeport Historic District National Register Nomination*. Unpublished draft. 2012.

Bennett, Lola. *Covered Bridges NHL Context Study (Draft)*. Washington, DC: National Park Service. 2012.
<http://www.nps.gov/nhl/learn/specialstudies/CoveredBridges.pdf>. Accessed 06/03/2014.

²¹ Nevada County California, Assessment Roll, 1862.

²² *The Morning Union*, Nevada City, August 19, 1919.

²³ Nevada County 14th District Court, Judgment and Auction, Deed recorded July 19, 1866 (Deed 25-11).

²⁴ Nevada County Supervisors' Minutes, BK 6-696, April 9, 1901.

²⁵ California State Parks, South Yuba River State Park brochure, 2009, 2.

²⁶ *The Morning Union*, Nevada City, June 12, 1927, p. 2, col. 3.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ *The Morning Union*, Nevada City, May 1, 1931, p. 3, col. 2, & June 27, 1931, p. 1.

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Hines, Philip. *A Partial Cultural Resources Inventory of the South Yuba River Project*. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Parks and Recreation, 1996. [\\mshqgeo\GIS\UDF\Park_Unit_359\Cultural\AR_359_569.pdf](#). Accessed via UDF Metadata Portal 05/15/2014.

Polanich, Judith K. *South Yuba River State Park Scope of Collections Statement*. Sacramento, CA: Department of Parks and Recreation, 2007. [\\mshqgeo\GIS\UDF\Park_Unit_359\Cultural\AR_359_572.pdf](#). Accessed via UDF Metadata Portal 05/15/2014.

South Yuba River State Park Association volunteers and staff with advice and assistance of Lucille Kneebone Brandt. *The Historic Kneebone Family Cemetery at Bridgeport*. Penn Valley, CA: South Yuba River State Park Association, Revised December 2011. <http://www.southyubariverstatepark.org/Documents/Cultural%20History/Cemetery/Kneebone%20Cemetery.pdf>. Accessed 06/04/2014.

Tamagni, John. *Park History Outline*. Penn Valley, CA: South Yuba River State Park Association. N.d. 1986? <http://www.southyubariverstatepark.org/Documents/Cultural%20History/Park%20Chron%20History/Tamagni%20History%20Outline.pdf>. Accessed 06/04/2014.

Welts, Allen W. *Bridgeport Covered Bridge National Register Nomination*. Washington DC: National Park Service, 1971. <http://pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/NRHP/Text/71000168.pdf> Accessed via NPS Focus Database 05/14/2014.

B13. Remarks:

In the fall of 2002, Bridgeport Covered Bridge was added to a list of covered bridges under consideration for National Historic Landmark (NHL) status. The 2012 draft *Covered Bridges NHL Context Study* included:

Bridgeport Bridge (1862), Nevada County, California. Bridgeport Bridge is a remarkable example of nineteenth-century timber bridge engineering. With a clear span of 209', this Howe truss with auxiliary arches is the longest single-span covered bridge in the United States. It was erected in 1862 for the Virginia City Turnpike, a major route into the Sierra Mountains during the California Gold Rush. Nevada County purchased the bridge in 1901 and it continued to carry traffic until it was bypassed in 1973. The South Yuba River State Park was developed in the late 1980s, at which time the State of California purchased the bridge from Nevada County. Bridgeport Bridge was recorded by HABS [Historic American Buildings Survey] in 1934 and by HAER [Historic American Engineering Record] in 2002. It was designated a National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark by the American Society of Civil Engineers in 1870 and was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1971. This bridge possesses a high degree of integrity and is proposed for National Historic Landmark consideration under Criterion 4 [architecture/construction]; however, the span was recently closed due to structural problems and its future is uncertain.

***B14. Evaluators:** Amy H. Crain, State Historian II, California State Parks, Office of Historic Preservation;
Kathleen Kennedy, State Historian II, California State Parks, Archaeology, History & Museums;
Denise Jaffke, Associate State Archaeologist, California State Parks, Sierra District

***Date of Evaluation:** May-June 2014

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Photo 1. Side view of the Bridgeport covered wooden covered bridge taken from the east.
Photographed by David Anderson, June 2012.



Photo 2. Oblique view of south entrance, also showing east side of bridge.
Photographed by David Anderson, June 2012.



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Photo 3. Interior viewed from south. Photographed by Kathleen Kennedy, June 2014.



Photo 4. North side of the Bridgeport Barn viewed from the bridge. Photographed by David Anderson, June 2012.



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Photo 5. Bridgeport barn from the southeast. Photographed by David Anderson, June 2012.



Photo 6. Bridgeport barn from the southwest. Photographed by Kathleen Kennedy, June 2014.



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Photo 7. Jackson hayfork in the barn. Photographed by David Anderson, June 2012.



Photo 8. Bridgeport barn from the southeast; Shell station in foreground. Photographed by Kathleen Kennedy, June 2014.



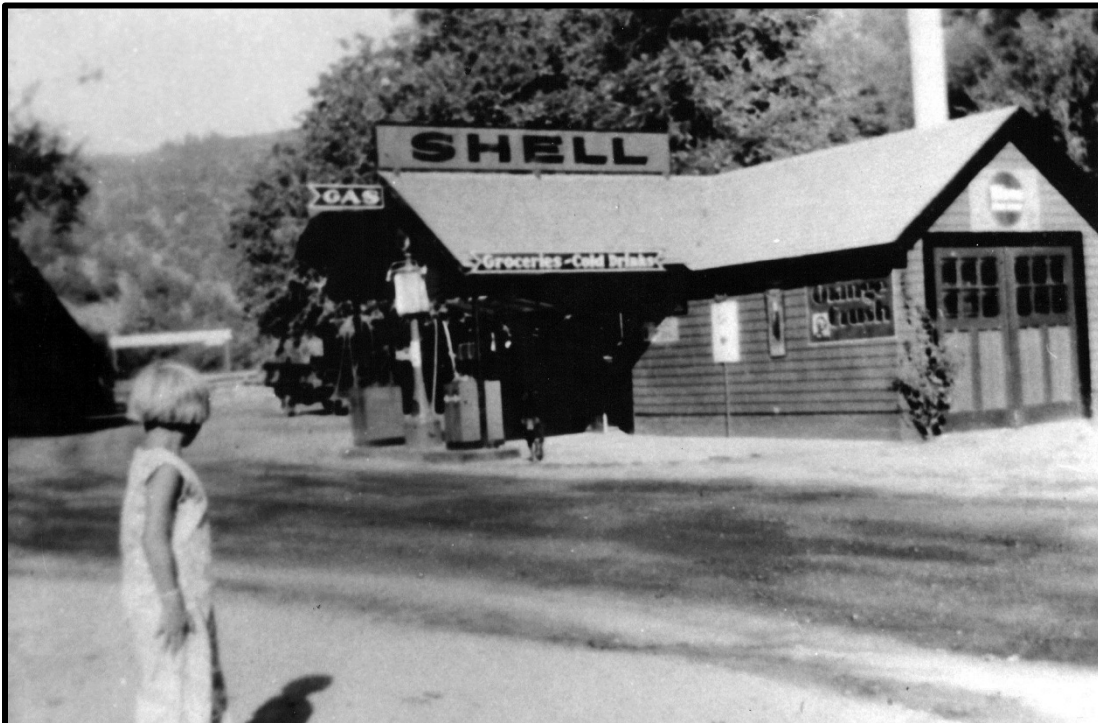
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Photo 9. Gas station. Photographed by David Anderson, June 2012.



Figure 1. Shell gas station circa 1927. Photographer unknown.



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Photo 10. Foundation remains of the Harrison greenhouse.
Photographed by David Anderson, June 2012.



Photo 11. Watering trough adjacent to barn. Photographed by David Anderson, June 2012.



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Photo 12. Dairy barn and tack shed foundations from the north.
Photographed by David Anderson, June 2012.



Photo 13. Turnpike walls, looking west. Photographed by David Anderson, June 2012.



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Photo 14. Turnpike wall, close-up. Photographed by Kathleen Kennedy, June 2014.



Photo 15. Kneebone Family Cemetery, looking north. Photographed by David Anderson, June 2012.



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Photo 16. Kneebone Family Cemetery from northeast corner. Photographed by Kathleen Kennedy, June 2014.



Photo 17. South Yuba River State Park Visitor Center. Photographed by David Anderson, June 2012.



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Photo 18. Generator house. Photographed by David Anderson, June 2012.



Photo 19. Plaques alongside the turnpike on the southern approach to the bridge: California Historical Landmark No. 390 (registered 1947, plaque dedicated 1964) & National Civil Engineering Landmark (1970). Photographed by Kathleen Kennedy, June 2014.



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Photo 20. Plaque alongside the turnpike on the southern approach to the bridge, placed by Daughters of the American Colonists (1973). Photographed by Kathleen Kennedy, June 2014.



Figure 2. Plaque alongside the turnpike on the northern approach to the bridge, placed in 1948 by Native Daughters of the Golden West. Photographer and date unknown.



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As presented at www.parks.ca.gov, South Yuba River State Park, California State Parks.



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Site Map

