

## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: <b>California</b>
COUNTY: <b>Nevada</b>
FOR NPS USE ONLY
ENTRY DATE <b>APR 14 1975</b>

### 1. NAME

COMMON: <b>Ott's Assay Office/South Yuba Canal Office</b>
AND/OR HISTORIC: <b>Ott's Assay Office/South Yuba Canal Office</b>

### 2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: <b>130 Main Street</b>			
CITY OR TOWN: <b>Nevada City</b>		CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT: <b>Second</b>	
STATE <b>California</b>	CODE <b>95959</b>	COUNTY: <b>Nevada</b>	CODE <b>057</b>

### 3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY <small>(Check One)</small>	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered <input type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted* <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No
PRESENT USE <small>(Check One or More as Appropriate)</small> <b>*By City Insurance Carrier</b>			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) <b>Vacant</b>

### 4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME: <b>City of Nevada City</b>		
STREET AND NUMBER: <b>317 Broad Street</b>		
CITY OR TOWN: <b>Nevada City</b>	STATE: <b>California</b>	CODE: <b>06</b>

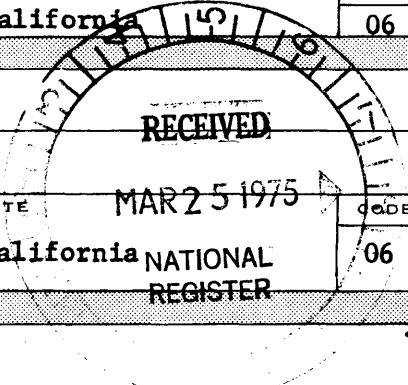
### 5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.: <b>County of Nevada</b>		
STREET AND NUMBER: <b>Courthouse Square</b>		
CITY OR TOWN: <b>Nevada City</b>	STATE: <b>California</b>	CODE: <b>06</b>

### 6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY: <b>Nevada County Historical Landmarks</b>		
DATE OF SURVEY: <input type="checkbox"/> Federal <input type="checkbox"/> State <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> County <input type="checkbox"/> Local		
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: <b>Nevada County Historical Landmarks Commission</b>		
STREET AND NUMBER: <b>529 East Broad Street</b>		
CITY OR TOWN: <b>Nevada City</b>	STATE: <b>California</b>	CODE: <b>06</b>

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



STATE: California  
COUNTY: Nevada  
ENTRY NUMBER: APR 14 1975  
DATE: FOR NPS USE ONLY

**7. DESCRIPTION**

CONDITION

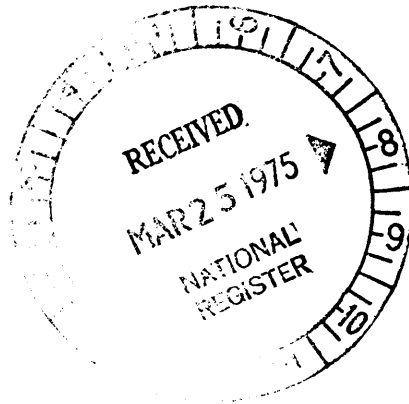
(Check One)					
<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
(Check One)			(Check One)		
<input type="checkbox"/> Altered		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unaltered		<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The City Drug Store, which later became Ott's Assay Office, was completed in August, 1855. It was built of native brick, mortared with sand and lime and covered with a coating of paint. It was constructed for Dr. John Lark, Nevada City's first druggist. In conjunction with A. W. Potter, next door proprietor of a crockery store, a common wall a foot or more thick was erected and, from this retaining structure, a store was built on either side.

It was the 3rd building on this site, as earlier buildings of wood had been destroyed in the fires of 1851 and 1854. This brick building is the oldest business building remaining in Nevada City and, as such, its appearance has not changed since 1855.

The enclosed photographs of the two original buildings comprising the complex show the physical appearance of the restored South Yuba Canal Building and the deteriorated Ott's Assay Office Building. When Ott's Assay Office Building is restored, the building complex should appear as it did when it was originally completed in 1855.



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**8. SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian!       16th Century       18th Century       20th Century  
 15th Century       17th Century       19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) **Constructed 1855**

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |   |   |  |
|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal          | <input type="checkbox"/> Education              | <input type="checkbox"/> Political          | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric         | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Phi-      | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic            | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry               | losophy                                     | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture         | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention              | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Science | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture        | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape              | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture          | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                 | Architecture                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Human-      | _____                                    |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature             | itarian                                     | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications      | <input type="checkbox"/> Military               | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater            | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation        | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation     | _____                                    |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

**OTT'S ASSAY OFFICE**

The Ott's Assay Office that had opened in 1857 was located next door to Dr. Lark's Drug Store.

Its owner, James J. Ott, would complete an assay report in 1859 that would alter the course of history and bring him fame. J. P. Stone and W. P. Morrison, two residents of Nevada City who were working the Washoe deposits, brought samples of the ore (a blue-black stuff) to James J. Ott for Assay on June 24, 1859. An article in the Nevada Journal, Nevada City's first newspaper, July 1, 1859, telling of the fabulous ore brought to Ott's Assay Office from the Washoe Country by Stone and Morrison, precipitated the great Washoe Rush.

The development of the Comstock Lode had begun, which hastened the formation of the State of Nevada and established Ott's reputation as a skilled assayer.

Dr. Lark's City Drug Store operated from 1851 to 1857. The business consisted of the selling of drugs, chemicals, paints, glass, oils and cosmetics. An ad in the Nevada Journal, September 21, 1855, is as follows:

"First arrival of the CAMEL TRAIN over the plains! The quickest time of record!! Only 12 days and 6 hours from St. Louis to Nevada! A train of fifteen Asiatic Camels have just arrived from St. Louis under the Direction of Kalib Barri, an Egyptian Driver, freighted with drugs, medicines, paints, oils, window glass, brushes, etc. for John Lark, wholesale and retail druggist, fireproof brick building, Main Street, Nevada."

Dr. Lark sold his business to Dr. Harvey Hunt in October, 1857. It then became known as the "Rudolph and Hunt Drug Store" from that date until the Spring of 1863. On returning to the East, Dr. Hunt leased the building to a Mr. Larabee as a harness-saddler's shop until after the fire of that year.

It was then purchased by James J. Ott for \$600 after his assay office burned to the ground during the same fire of 1863 and his flourishing assay business was relocated in the former City Drug Store. When the South Yuba Canal Water Company closed its office in 1880, James J. Ott soon bought that building and expanded his operation into this adjoining building.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Newsfiles of The Nevada City Journal, Nevada City Transcript.

Nevada County Book of Deeds Vol. 2 pp. 400, 448; Vol. 13 p. 466

"The Six Earliest Buildings in Nevada City", by Doris Foley, pub. 1969, Grass Valley Union.

History of Nevada County, Thompson and West, 1880.

P. G. & E. of California, Charles M. Coleman, McGraw-Hill, 1952.

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

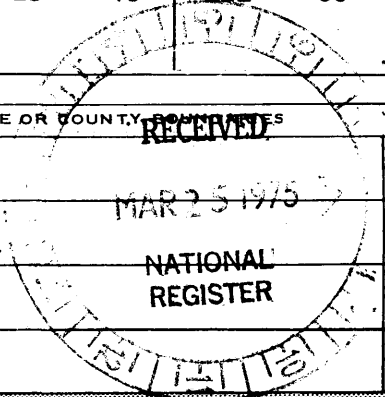
LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	° ' "	° ' "		39 15 48	121 00 57	
NE	° ' "	° ' "				
SE	° ' "	° ' "				
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

10/671200  
4347650  
CO

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **.05 acre**

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
**Beryl P. Robinson, Jr., City Manager**

ORGANIZATION: **City of Nevada City** DATE: **January 24, 1975**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**317 Broad Street**

CITY OR TOWN: **Nevada City** STATE: **California 95959** CODE: **06**

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National  State  Local

Name: *B. Robinson*

Title: State Historic Preservation Officer

Date: MAR 17 1975

**NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

*A. R. Mortensen*  
Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date: 4/14/75

ATTEST:

*W. Huntz*  
Keeper of The National Register

Date: APR 9 1975

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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Continuation of Statement of Significance

Thus, from its early beginnings in 1857 when it was located in the rear of a building and entered from the back street, the Ott's Assay Office, by 1880, had expanded to occupy two fine brick buildings fronting one of the main commercial streets in the business district.

When James J. Ott died in 1907, the assay office continued under his son, Emil Ott, who operated the business until it closed in 1955. And time eventually erased all evidence that the structure long designated Ott's Assay Office consisted of two buildings; few were aware that an earlier assay office had existed.

In the 1960 period, the Ott's Assay Office became a virtual cause celebre, for the proposed route of the future freeway endangered the building. The need to prove the building's historical significance required painstaking research which was done by the County Historian, Doris Foley. Information gleaned from original records diminished many claims, but uncovered a long buried history that was far more interesting than the one time and legend had created. The California Division of Highways changed the design of the Freeway to save the Assay Office. It was estimated by the Division of Highways that it cost \$235,000 to make the necessary changes in the Freeway Construction to save the building.

The two original buildings comprising the Ott's Assay Office and South Yuba Canal Office were documented as the oldest business buildings now existing in Nevada City. Aaron A. Sargent - whose contributions to Nevada City and distinguished political and diplomatic career had termed him "first citizen" of Nevada City - had had his law office in the 2nd floor of the structure known as South Yuba Canal Water Company. And the history of the South Yuba Canal Water Company would earn registration as a state historical landmark for the building.

The City Drug Store is the earliest documented drug store in Nevada City. The historical significance of this building should also include its use as an assay office that operated for almost a century that was established by an assayer who became world known in his field.

SOUTH YUBA CANAL OFFICE

The two story brick South Yuba Canal Company building adjoins the Ott Assay Office. In conjunction with Dr. John Lark, next door proprietor of a drug store, A. W. Potter erected a common wall, a foot thick or more, from which a brick store was built on either side. It was completed in September, 1855.

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Dwight Crittenden became a partner, and the business known as Potter & Crittenden Crockery Store was established. In March, 1856, Crittenden bought the Potter interest and the name was changed to "Crockery of Crittenden". Another business on the same floor was that of George Welch, who conducted a book and stationery store known as The Pioneer Book Store.

In the upstairs rooms, Doctors Robert M. and Harvey Hunt had offices numbered 1 and 3 while A. A. Sargent, who had been admitted to the bar in April, 1854, used office number 2.

The building withstood the fire of 1856. On October 5, 1857, Crittenden sold to James Whartenby, representing the South Yuba Canal Company.

Notes On The Development of The South Yuba Canal Company

"As early as March, 1850, a small ditch 1 1/2 miles long was dug from Mosquito Creek to Coyote Hill and, in May, another from Little Deer Creek to Phelps Hill."

p.171 Thompson & West's History of Nevada County, 1880

"During the spring and early summer of 1849, several thousand men toiled strenuously and many of them exceedingly profitably recovering gold from the shallow workings in the auriferous gravel stratum on the slopes of the hills north of the town of Nevada (City). Here, while water was available, ground sluicing was resorted to and pans and cradles were generally superseded by long toms and board sluices. Late in April, however, the little streams and ravines and seasonal water courses gradually decreased in volume and miners, who had been washing their gravel at or near their workings, were forced to tote the pay dirt down to Deer Creek and cradle or sluice it there.

Faced by the alternative of carrying the gravel to running water or bringing water to their gravel, they chose the latter ..... they proceeded to dig ditches to the workings ...

The first of these more ambitious ditches, completed in May (1850), was from "Mosketo Creek", a small tributary of Deer Creek. These - the "Deer Creek" and the "Coyote" ditches, each about two miles and a half in length, were consolidated by their owners to form the Coyote and Deer Creek Water Company, the first company to be incorporated in the United States, ..... for the purpose of supplying water for auriferous gravel mining operations, ....

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A ditch started in 1853 was to play a most important part in the history of this country. Early in this year, Rich and Fordyce began the construction of a canal to bring the water of the South Yuba to the gravel workings at Nevada City, a distance of sixteen miles. Legal difficulties with the Coyote and Deer Creek Water Co. intervened and finally led to a consolidation and the creation of the great South Yuba Canal Company."

"Gold Rush Days in Nevada City" by H. P. Davis, Nevada City historian (Berliner & McGinnis, Nevada City, 1948)

"November, 1850: Deer Creek Water Company and Coyote Water Company consolidated in the fall of 1851."

"July, 1855: Rock Creek, Coyote and Deer Creek and South Yuba Canal Company, a consolidation of all the early water companies. Ditch from the South Yuba to the head of Deer Creek and to Alpha and Omega, the most stupendous ditch operation in the state."

(from A. A. Sargent's introduction to Brown & Dallison's 1856 Directory)

"This company owns the most extensive and valuable water rights in the county with 275 miles of ditch, 7 large storage reservoirs built or bought at a cost of two million dollars. It begins at the South Yuba, extends 16 miles using a flume 7 miles in length set in solid wall rock for 1 1/2 miles through the South Yuba canon and is, in places, 100 ft. high. The tunnel, 3800 ft. long at the head of Deer Creek, enables the waters of the ditch to flow into that stream."

"South Yuba Canal Company" pg.173 Thompson & West's History of Nevada County 1880

Quote from the P. G. & E. of California, by Charles M. Coleman, published by McGraw - Hill Book Company, N.Y., 1952

Page 4: "While the Argonauts delved for gold, others saw fortunes to be made in digging ditches and building flumes to deliver streams of water under gravity pressure for the miners' use. Starting with one short ditch in Nevada County in 1850, mining men built a vast network of waterways that reached into every canyon where placers were being worked. In his classic report of 1868 on "Mineral Resources of the West," J. Ross Browne declared that by 1863, the conduit system of Northern California included 5,328 miles of 'artificial water courses.' These and others built later were the heritage left by the gold miners to the hydroelectric men who followed.

Thus it happened, although P. G. & E. traces its lineage as a gas and electric utility back to the San Francisco Gas Company which was incorporated in 1852, the earliest company on its corporate 'family tree' is the Little Rock Creek Ditch Company which was incorporated

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in 1850 in Nevada County and later consolidated into the South Yuba Water Company's far-flung canal network which eventually became part of the electric system."

The foregoing references establish that the SOUTH YUBA CANAL WATER COMPANY, in its corporate parts, contained the earliest (1850) ditches used in California mining operations and the first (1851) incorporated water company in the United States to furnish water for auriferous gravel mining operations. That this company was, in 1855, termed the largest ditch operation in the state and, in 1880, its holdings (valued at two million dollars) were described as including 275 miles of ditch and seven storage reservoirs that employed a tunnel 3,800 feet long in the operation to transport water 16 miles from the South Yuba to Deer Creek in Nevada City.

The SOUTH YUBA CANAL WATER COMPANY contained the earliest company in the corporate lineage of P. G. & E. and hydraulic mining, which began in Nevada County. This was possible only because the vast network of ditches owned by this company supplied the volume of water needed.

Thus it is shown that this water company's operations presents a series of claims --- earliest ditch, first incorporated water company, largest ditch operation. And that its role in the history of California's mining and hydro-electric fields was definitive.





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6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS (Continued)

TITLE OF SURVEY:

State Historical Landmark #832

DATE OF SURVEY:

August 29, 1969

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

California Department of Parks and Recreation

STREET AND NUMBER:

P. O. Box 2390

CITY OR TOWN:

Sacramento

STATE:

California 95811