

PHON 1953

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: California	
COUNTY: Stanislaus	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
	APR 23 1975

1. NAME

COMMON:
Knights Ferry
AND/OR HISTORIC:
Knights Ferry

2. LOCATION

~~Northeastern~~ Stanislaus County on the Stanislaus River about two miles downstream from the Stanislaus-Calaveras line *CA 108/120*
CITY OR TOWN:
Knights Ferry
STATE: **California** CODE: **06** COUNTY: **Stanislaus** CODE: **099**

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Park <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) Rural Farming

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:
Various owners
STREET AND NUMBER:
CITY OR TOWN:
STATE: **California** CODE: **06**

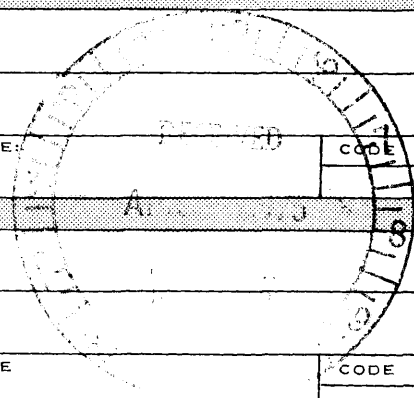
5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:
Clerk-Recorder
STREET AND NUMBER:
1100 Eye Street, Room 122
CITY OR TOWN:
Modesto
STATE: **California** CODE: **06**

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:
None
DATE OF SURVEY: Federal State County Local
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:
Clerk-Recorder
STREET AND NUMBER:
1100 Eye Street, Room 122
CITY OR TOWN:
Modesto
STATE: **California** CODE: **06**

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7. DESCRIPTION

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

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Knights Ferry is located at a point where the Stanislaus River leaves the confines of its narrow canyon and begins to meander and form a wider valley as it approaches the Great Central Valley of California. This natural river crossing site provided an ideal location for William Knight's trading post. The traffic generated by the Gold Rush enabled the site to develop into a major river crossing and trading center, as the main road from the Central Valley to the Southern Mines passed through this point.

The trading settlement at the ferry crossing developed into a town, and as placer deposits in the immediate vicinity proved to be gold-bearing the town became a center of mining activity in the 1850's. The townsite was laid out on the north bank of the river; Main Street, the commercial and political axis of the town, was laid out parallel to the river. Residences were built on the hillside rising behind the main street; additional buildings on the lower side of Main Street were subject to the rise and fall of floodwaters of the Stanislaus River, but the remainder of the town stood above the level of normal winter flooding.

Knights Ferry remains as the most picturesque of the old Stanislaus River towns with many buildings remaining from its period of primary historical significance as an early mining and trading center and seat of county government. A number of buildings still show the Classical and Gothic Revival preferences of their builders. Along Main Street, some of the remaining buildings include the old Knights Ferry Hotel; the General Store, which has been in operation since 1852; and the old Odd Fellows Lodge Hall. At the edge of the "plaza" (the site of the courthouse when Knights Ferry served as the county seat from 1862 to 1872) stand the Masonic Hall and the Abraham Schell House; these two Classical Revival buildings were constructed by Schell, who arrived in Knights Ferry in 1856 from New York. They appear in a photo dated 1860, hence their date of construction falls within the 1856-60 period.

Many of the side streets on the hillside above Main Street are terraced with walls of locally quarried native sandstone. In this area a number of houses remain from the early period of the town's history, retaining the basic Gothic Revival lines of their original designs, although alterations have taken place through the years. The Methodist Episcopal Church, a small shingled structure built in the early 1900's, occupies the site of the earlier Methodist Episcopal Church of 1860. The Dent House, also referred to as the "Long House", was constructed in the early 1850's and still retains the integrity of its original design.

In the 1860's the top of the hill overlooking the town became the site of Knights Ferry's schoolhouse; this building was replaced in 1899 by another schoolhouse structure. The 1899 building survived until recently when a new, modern school replaced it on the same site overlooking the town.

At the eastern end of the district, stand the ruins of an early grist mill. The original mill, constructed in 1854, was swept away in the flood of 1862. The brick warehouse of the 1854 mill still stands, but the present stone

(continued)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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grist mill constructed by David Tulloch dates from 1862. The imposing ruins of the mill and its millrace can still be seen along the river adjacent to the Knights Ferry covered bridge. The stone buildings of the grist mill and the piers and abutments of the covered bridge were all built by T. Vincent, an English stonemason. The pink and brown stone used in the Tulloch Mill is local sandstone quarried from the nearby slopes. Other stones in the main east and south walls are from granite and conglomerate river boulders. The Knights Ferry covered bridge, constructed after the flood of 1862 washed out an earlier bridge at the site, is one of only 11 such structures remaining in California; it is the longest covered bridge in the State, and is still in operation carrying vehicular traffic across the Stanislaus River.

The modern community of Knights Ferry still retains strong integrity of setting, located in the picturesque river valley of the Stanislaus. From a distance the town appears to have retained much of its early appearance. Unfortunately, some changes have intruded upon the overall integrity of the district. A number of historic structures formerly stood on the south side of Main Street between the street and the river. Many of these have been lost to flooding through the years, including the old firehouse, which was lost in the flood of 1955. Modern intrusions can be noticed in the district, especially mobile homes which have been placed on vacant lots within the town. Some of the historic structures in the district have had alterations to their design and fabric. However, the district has a high concentration of historic structures dating from its early history, and the picturesque old river town still retains much of the feeling of the early mining and trading center of the 1860's.

SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century | |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

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

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The historic town of Knights Ferry is situated on the north bank of the Stanislaus River just where it disgorges from the foothill canyons to begin its meandering course through the plains of the San Joaquin Valley, an ideal point for a river crossing. With the advent of the California Gold Rush of 1848, William Knight, a trader and scout for John C. Fremont, established a trading post and ferry at this site. The ferry became an important river crossing on the road to the Southern Mines; this, along with the subsequent discovery and exploitation of local placer gold deposits, contributed to the growth of the town around the ferry crossing in the mid-1850's. William Knight's success was short-lived, as it is said that he was gunned down on the streets of the settlement late in 1849 and is buried near the Masonic Hall in the town. With the death of Knight, John and Lewis Dent and James Vantine took over Knight's business interests. Captain John Dent was the head of an Indian agency which had been established by the United States government in 1850 at Knights Ferry. John and Lewis Dent's sister, Julia, married Ulysses S. Grant; Grant visited his brothers-in-law in Knights Ferry in 1854. The Dent brothers and David M. Locke constructed a grist mill on the river bank some 300 yards east of the ferry site, making the town an industrial site as well as a mining and trading center. The remains of the mill are still evident, although the structure has deteriorated into ruins through the years. With the increased Gold Rush traffic at the river crossing and the development of mining in the Knights Ferry area, the need was evident for a bridge to span the Stanislaus at this point. The first bridge was constructed in the late 1850's up-river from the ferry crossing by David Locke, who is said to have used plans based upon a design by Ulysses S. Grant. The first bridge, along with most of the town, washed out in the flood of 1862 and was replaced by the present covered bridge in the same year. A large portion of the grist mill was also lost in the flood; the mill was rebuilt after the flood by David Tulloch.

The town of Knights Ferry became an important mining and trading center during the 1850's and its importance was further validated by its designation as the county seat of Stanislaus County in 1862, a distinction which it held for a period of 10 years. Many of its earliest structures still survive. Several of the town's oldest buildings were built by Abraham Schell, who came west from New York during the Gold Rush. Schell settled in Knights Ferry in July of 1856. In that same year, he loaned money to the San Joaquin Water Company to complete the mining ditch then in

(continued)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

A Brief History of Stanislaus County, by Margaret Annear, Herbert C. Florcken and Dr. Hugh Baker, published 1950 by Stanislaus County Schools.
 Elias, Sol P., Stories of Stanislaus, c. 1924, published in Modesto.
 Branch, L., History of Stanislaus County, Elliott and Moore, San Francisco, 1881.
 Tinkham, George H., History of Stanislaus County, Historic Record Co., Los Angeles, 1921.
 Renteh, H. E. and Hoover, E. G., Mildred Brook, Historic Spots in California, Stanford University Press, 1933.

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	
NW	Degrees Minutes Seconds 37° 49' 19"	Degrees Minutes Seconds 120° 40' 26"		Degrees Minutes Seconds ° ' "	Degrees Minutes Seconds ° ' "	
NE	37° 49' 19"	120° 39' 41"				
SE	37° 49' 06"	120° 39' 41"				
SW	37° 49' 06"	120° 40' 26"				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **107.**

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: William Tiernan, Park Director (Revised: History Preservation Section, Calif. Dept. of Parks & Rec.)

ORGANIZATION: County of Stanislaus DATE: 6-30-70

STREET AND NUMBER: 1100 Eye Street, Room 300

CITY OR TOWN: Modesto STATE: California CODE: 06

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

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: [Signature]

Title: State Liaison Officer

Date: October 16, 1970

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

[Signature]
 Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date: 4/23/75

ATTEST:
[Signature]
 Keeper of The National Register

Date: APR 22 1975

NW 10/704 74C
 SE 10/706 860/418 020
 SW 10/704 74C/418 000
 SEE INSTRUCTIONS
 CD

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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the progress of construction to bring water to the rich surface diggings lying in and about Knights Ferry. Schell was also a lawyer and banker and his early entrepreneurial efforts brought him a considerable amount of success, as evidenced by the quality of the buildings which he constructed which have survived to the present. Schell built an impressive Classical Revival home overlooking the main street of Knights Ferry. The building also functioned as Schell's bank. Mr. Schell constructed another building adjacent to his home for use as a town hall; the upper story was sold to the Masonic Order in 1864. The building is still in use as the Masonic Hall. The designs of Schell's two buildings are remarkably similar; they were constructed some time in the period between 1856 and 1860. In the 1860's, Schell purchased 3-1/2 leagues of land embraced in the Mexican land grant known as "Rancheria del Rio Estanislao". Upon a portion of this property, Schell established a number of vineyards and his early efforts at wine production became known throughout California and also on the East Coast. In a newspaper of the period, the Stockton Independent, dated March 1, 1873, the following description appears: "The largest and most complete vineyard in this portion of the state is located about one mile from Knights Ferry on Littlejohn Creek in Stanislaus County. It is called Red Mountain Vineyard and is owned by A. Schell. Seventy-five acres are planted with vines and the vineyard contains about 60,000 vines. The winehouse and cellar are constructed on the side of a hill...While visiting this cellar we counted 58 butts in the tunnel holding about 150 gallons each, all filled with wine of superior quality and marked for shipment to New York."

A number of other structures remain from this early period of Knights Ferry's history. Some residences still show Gothic Revival detailing while the Schell buildings show strong elements of Classical Revival styling popular during the period of the late 1850's. The covered bridge itself is one of the last remaining covered bridges in California and has been photographed probably more than any other point of interest in Stanislaus County. The County purchased the bridge in 1884 for \$7,000 and it still serves as the primary access route to the town.

The town of Knights Ferry still remains one of the most picturesque of the old river towns with its covered bridge and grist mill complex at one end and its collection of buildings dating primarily from the late 1850's-early 1860's. It presents a relatively intact unit depicting the period when Knights Ferry was an important placer mining and trading center.