

Newspaper and Geologic Reports of the Pritchard marble quarry operation and Holmes lime kiln on the Bear River near Colfax

From Geologic Reports:

Logan, Clarence A., 1947, Limestone in California: California Journal of Mines and Geology, Vol. 43, No. 3. P. 262-263.

p. 262:

Placer County

The line of the Central Pacific Railroad (now the Ogden Route, Southern Pacific Company) [ed. now Union Pacific Railroad] was built in the early sixties [ed. 1860's] and traverses nearly the entire width of Placer County from west to east. San Francisco was the metropolis of the state then, and lime was in great demand there for building, but transportation from nearby deposits was poor. Many small deposits of high-calcium limestone were found within a few miles of the railroad near Auburn, Clipper Gap, Applegate, and Colfax and with cheap rail and water transportation to San Francisco it was natural that these should be opened and equipped with lime kilns. This activity continued into the first decade after 1900, when Portland cement began to displace both granite and brick. No lime kilns have been operated in the county since 1910, and the last recorded limestone production was in 1916.

p. 263:

Bear River Marble (formerly Holmes Lime & Cement Company). The Bear River deposit in W $\frac{1}{2}$ of lot 2 of NW $\frac{1}{4}$ sec. 4, T. 14N., R. 9 E., MD, is now assessed to Santa Cruz Title Company, Santa Cruz, California. It has been idle for a long time. It is 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles by road west of Colfax.

This was one of the earliest known marble deposits in the state, having been found in 1866. It is a dark gray stone with jet black as well as white veining, and takes a high polish. It was used in considerable quantity in San Francisco for interior work, notably in the U.S. Mint and Bank of California buildings. Later, two kilns were built and lime was burned, but there has been no production for over 30 years. A face 400 feet long was worked. It is on the south bank of Bear River and a tramway 1000 feet long was used to raise stone out of the canyon to the road. [ed. Remnants of the tramway buckets are seen on the ground at the top end of the tramway. Therefore the tramway was more likely used to haul up the processed lime and not the dimensional stone mined in the earlier days of the quarry operation]

Aubury, L.E., 1906, The Structural and Industrial Materials of California: California Division of Mines and Geology, Bulletin 38, 412 p.

p 74:

Placer County

Holmes Limekilns, in Sec. 33, T. 15 N., R 9 E.; The Holmes Lime Company, 24 Sacramento street, San Francisco, owner. The works are on the east bank of Bear River, 2 miles west of Colfax. The quarry was operated for eight months in 1904, burning lime in one of the two kilns.

This limestone was first quarried in 1870 for marble. (See under “Marble.”) The exposure in the quarry is 200 feet wide and 50 feet high. About 2000 feet north the ledge crops for a length of 100 feet over a width of 40 feet. The general dip is to the east. There are 46 acres in the holding, including quarry, kilns, tramway, Pelton wheelhouse, reservoir tank, and storage house. The kilns are updraft, of 6 tons daily capacity each, though they have not been operated beyond 5 tons. Wood is used for fuel. The tramway for carrying the lime from the kilns to the storage house is 1000 feet long, at an inclination of 40 degrees, and operated by a 24-inch Pelton waterwheel.

p 101:

Placer County

Holmes Lime Company’s Quarry in Sec 33, T. 15 N., R. 9 E.; Holmes Lime Company, San Francisco, owner. (See Limestone.) Thirty-five years ago marble was sawed and polished from this limestone ledge by a man named Pritchard, who made the marble columns for the entrance way to the Napa Insane Asylum and tiling for the floor of the San Francisco branch mint building.

Geology Map Reference

Loyd, Ralph C., 1995, Mineral Land Classification of Placer County, Open File Report 95-10: Plate 1 Geology.

This sliver of limestone (marble) deposit is mapped as Mariposa Formation (Jurassic) by Loyd, 1995. The Mariposa Formation is comprised of metamorphosed marine sediments that includes slate, conglomerate, greywacke, metavolcanic and minor tuff and limestone. The prevailing dip of the units at this location is mapped as 15° to the east.

From Newspaper Accounts:

Sacramento Union, January 13, 1866:

“MARBLE QUARRY: — An extensive marble ledge [ed. ledge is an archaic mining term for vein or lens of rock oriented at a particular azimuth and dip], says the Folsom *Telegraph*, has lately been discovered on Bear River, Placer County, near the Colfax and Nevada [City] road. The marble is of the best quality and of the black-veined and watered variety, and is said to be equal, if not superior, to the Italian marble of the same variety. A quarry has just been opened by a San Francisco firm, who are making extensive arrangements to work the same and bring the marble into market.”

Daily Alta California, April 18, 1867, reported on area marble works including the quarry at Colfax that were supplying the San Francisco construction needs:

MARBLE WORKS IN SAN FRANCISCO

“The principal source from which marble in blocks and slabs is obtained for this market is Italy. We have several quarries in California. The principal — Indian Diggings, El Dorado County — furnishes a very superior article, which is employed for all the purposes

that imported marble is used. Marble is also obtained from Drytown, Amador County; Columbia, Tuolumne County; and Colfax, near Sacramento. ... Mr. Pritchard, one of the owners of the Pioneer Steam Works, is also the owner of the quarry at Colfax; and Mr. John Grant manufactures monuments from material drawn from his property at Columbia.... Mr. Pritchard is the owner of a valuable quarry of black marble at Colfax. It will supply a want long felt in this branch of business. It is susceptible of a high polish, and can be used for general purposes. The quarry will be more fully developed at an early day, and it is well adapted for mantels, table tops, mosaic work, tiles, etc. The Colfax is the first and only quarry of black, variegated marble in California. Nine mantels of this beautiful marble, made at the Steam Works, are in progress of manufacture for the new Bank of California....”

Daily Alta California, November 15, 1872:

“The Grass Valley *Union* has the following: There is an extensive quarry of marble on the left bank of Bear River, one mile below the lower bridge of the Colfax road. The quarry has been worked for more than a year, off and on, by a San Francisco company. Marble of the very fine grain is taken out, and shipped to the Bay. At the present time stone is being quarried for a vault in San Francisco. The marble is both gray and blue.”

Sacramento Daily Union, May 7, 1874:

“MARBLE QUARRY.— The marble quarry, situated in Placer county, one mile below Taylor’s lower bridge, on the Colfax road, and owned by a San Francisco company, quarried and worked into merchantable shape 300 tons of marble, which was shipped to San Francisco from the Colfax depot. The largest portion of this marble was used in the new Mint, the balance went toward the adornment of private residences and business houses. The marble is black in color, variegated with fine grey streaks. It takes a beautiful polish, and is of superior quality as to durability. Work has been suspended on the quarry (which to appearance is almost of unlimited extent) during the winter, but the foreman of the works is anticipating instructions for an early resumption of labor.”