

History of Hogg’s Diggings

This cemetery contains two of the oldest marked graves known to exist in the county. Nothing is left of Weberville, Ringgold, and most other early mining camps. But here in Hogg’s Diggings we have a cemetery that proves that two young sisters died here in 1850.

Rebecca Lewis’s death date, Feb 15, 1850 is the oldest existing headstone in the county, per Find-A-Grave.

Introduce Nancy: Nancy Porter is the 3x great granddaughter of those girls’ parents, Thomas and Polly. Nancy has prominent family members in several area cemeteries. She is a genealogist and has published a book that tells her family story.

The marked graves in this cemetery reflect the people who lived here from the earliest advent of the California Gold Rush, and are proof on the ground that Hogg’s Diggings is one of the earliest known mining camps in the county.

What was here?

Gold. The place was named after early settler John B. Hogg. It was said that he once picked up a piece of gold weighing \$1,800. Others found pieces worth \$500 or more.

The oldest quartz mine in the area was the Hunt Mine, with shafts ranging from 26 to 40 feet deep. There was “a small and very imperfect” stamp mill here. Average return on the ore here was \$15 per ton.

Sioli called Hogg’s Diggings “a rich and active mining camp, supporting two or three stores and various other places found around mining camps.” We know what that means.... Saloons, brothels, etc.

John B. Hogg might not have been the first one here, but he was the first one who stayed. Hogg was purportedly an educated man of fine culture. He hailed from Tennessee, where he’d been Deputy Secretary of the State and Clerk of the Legislature.... A real life “Boss Hogg.”

He lived the balance of his life here, first as a successful miner and then as the first mine recorder of the district.

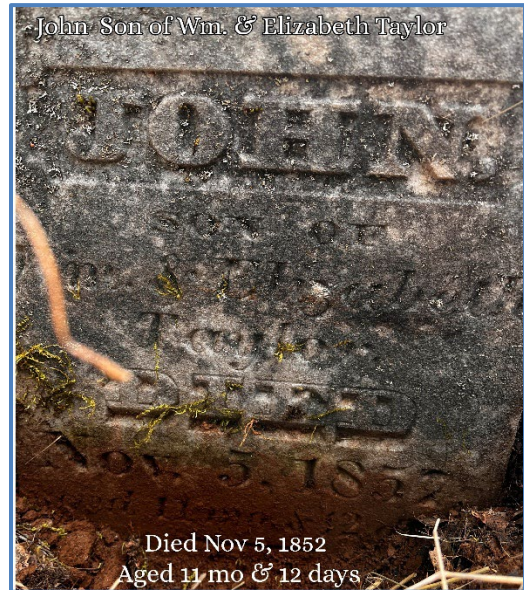


Hogg died in 1875, age 57-58. He was buried right here.... somewhere. He was a popular guy. But apparently not popular enough to get a permanent headstone... Smaller stone markers were often used for garden stepping stones.

Many grave markers in a place like would have been made of wood. A big fire swept through here in the 1890s... Nancy has more on that.

Other early settlers were William and Elizabeth, “Betsy” Taylor. They had 128 acres which included the land we are on. They were buried here in 1872 and 1904, respectively. John Taylor’ 1854 headstone is here, as is their infant son John’s.

Deeds and other land records used Hogg’s Diggings as a reference through the 1870s, when the Government Land Office (GLO) finally completed surveys of all the township and section lines in the state. After that, deeds referenced township and section numbers rather than landmarks. Another pioneer family, the Clarks, is represented. James Clark’s heavily encrusted 1885 tombstone is present.



Researcher Sue Silver did all this research. She argued that Hogg’s Diggings Cemetery qualifies as a publicly owned cemetery according to the definition of “prescriptive use” laid out in the 1872 Political Code Section 3105.

Qualifications include

- at least 6 confirmed burials
- Continuous use as a public cemetery, without interruption
- Located near a city, town, or village and used by residents of those places

The provisions of former Political Code section 3105 mandated that the title to qualifying lands was vested in the public, but there was no discussion of if or how that vestment might affect a subsequent deed to the property. Sue would have us believe that a prescriptive use vestment preceded, and therefore preempted any deed to the property. But no court has ever done so.



And no court is going to, at least not in El Dorado County, where property rights are taken VERY seriously. So the Niegel family, that owns this place, and has graciously allowed us to visit today, can rest easy.

Hogg's Diggings Cemetery was in continuous, uninterrupted use by the public from 1850 (Rebecca Ferguson) to at least 1904, when Elizabeth Taylor was buried here.

There are six marked and three confirmed unmarked graves in the cemetery. Sue also found six probable unmarked graves, with death dates up to 1910, and an additional 17 deaths in the area that are unaccounted for in other cemeteries, people who either died near Hogg's Diggings or had some familial connection to local families. She classified these as "possible unmarked graves." She normally put the "possibles" she discovered in Find-A-Grave as such, but failed to do so for Hogg's Diggings. In fact, this cemetery did not exist in Find-A-Grave until I recently added it.

Hogg's Diggings was nearly forgotten in the early 20th century. The last known ranch family here was the Taylors. Their ranch disappears from the records in 1908, suggesting that it was abandoned.

It shows back up in 1942, area resident Edward Flint published a column in the *Oakland Tribune* about a forgotten graveyard he came upon as a boy in 1907. He recalled the location as "in the vicinity of a once famous placer mine called 'Hoag's Diggings' (sic)." He described the memory.

"About two miles south of Cool on the Auburn-Placerville Road in El Dorado County and about a half a mile east of the old placer site, there was an old ranch, long since abandoned and gone back to brush and second growth timber. This was known as the 'Old Taylor Place.' My father had a bunch of cattle running on this place, and I was moving them when some steers broke out of the herd. In heading them back...I noted an old iron fence. After retrieving the cattle I rode back to investigate, and found that the fence surrounded a burying plot of nearly a dozen graves, some of which had the most beautiful monuments I had ever seen, being of white marble of which must have been nearly eight feet high. They bore the names of 'Taylor' and others, and if I remember correctly, were dated as far back as the early '60's. There had been no attention given to this graveyard for a number of years, as there were trees which must have been 40 years old growing among the monuments."

Flint recalls a fence surrounding "nearly a dozen" graves. What you see is what is left. Evidence of unmarked graves has been obliterated by stock and ranch equipment operations, but fallen headstones could be here underground.



My predecessors felt that this cemetery could be eligible for either the State or National Register of Historic Places, arguing that apart from the missing headstones, it’s a great example of a gold rush-era cemetery that remains in basically the same condition as it was when it was first in use. They felt that this is an excellent example of cemeteries of that time because unlike other Goldrush-era cemeteries in the county, Hogg’s Diggings was never used for modern burials. It contains the graves of the very people who settled Hogg’s Diggings, including the unmarked grave of Hogg’s Diggings namesake, John Baptiste Hogg. Other than mine tailings and remnants of an old ditch system, this cemetery is all that is left of this early El Dorado County gold rush mining camp and town.

The Fergusons

The Fergusons were farming in Missouri when they decided to go west in 1849. They initially ran a boarding house on the Middle Fork of the American River.

Details from Nancy about their arrival:

- *Daughter Rebecca and her husband were in a separate ox-driven wagon but traveled together with the rest of the family to California in 1849.*
- *Elizabeth Ferguson came in 1850 with another wagon train and died shortly after arrival.*
- *Death of Elizabeth and Rebecca? Sequence of events?*

After the 1850 river floods, they moved up to Pilot Hill, settling just north of the Bayley property. Their property became known as Ferguson Ranch. That first year in California, their eldest two daughters died (cause unknown).

David Ferguson, Thomas and Poly’s son, stayed in the area, just south of the Taylor ranch.

Thomas Ferguson died in 1877, but his family continued to work the Ferguson property. His widow, Polly, lived on the property until her death in 1895. After that her daughter, Mary Ferguson Marson Lee remained on the property with her brother, David Howard Campton Ferguson.

Mary was Nancy’s 2x great grandmother. She is buried with her second husband, Alexander Lee, in Greenwood Cemetery. They ran Lee’s American Exchange Hotel in Greenwood starting in 1877/78. He died in 1890. Mary ran the hotel until it burned in 1914.