

WHITLOCK MINE, MARIPOSA, CA

I received an email recently that said “I’m the owner of the Whitlock mine in Mariposa Co. California and I’m looking for any info. you might have on it. Also I will share my info with you But I will have to mail it I have too much to list. Thanks, Matt Evans” Needless to say I was intrigued!!

One of the items Matt Evans sent was from the *California Gold Camps*, published 1975:

“East of Bear Valley, on the south side of the Merced River and well above it, shown on Butler’s map, 1851, and on later maps. Mining started in 1849. One of the first outbreaks against Mexicans occurred here. The men who were driven out were apparently the Sonorans employed by the discoverers Thomas J. Whitlock. The reliable Daniel Woods tells the following story of the discovery. Whitlock and party discovered the deposit accidentally and took out \$30,000 from a small square spot of ground. When they went to Monterey to deposit the gold, two sailors overheard them, took a furlough of seven weeks, followed the Whitlocks, and returned to their ship with 90 pounds of gold.

Woods himself mined here in November, 1849, but was disappointed with the results. However, he met an old sailor who had kicked away an old stone and found underneath it a nugget worth \$500.

A similar lucky find is reported in the *Mariposa Chronicle*: The Thomas Whitlock Company found a nugget of almost 86 ounces with only a little quartz; it had been thrown away because it was covered by a black mineral substance. In a letter of September 1852, Whitlock, who had a claim here, speaks of successful operations with little outlay. “

From the *Mariposa Gazette* January 27, 1883:

“As early as 1850, I knew of the existence of gold-bearing quartz veins or lodes on Sherlock’s and Whitlock’s creeks, but as my Mexican and Chilean miners were giving me good returns from the placer claim I had bought from the Texas company, I was but little interested in the repeated declarations of my Mexicans that the veins were rich. Finally, at the conclusion of the Indian War of 1851, a party of Mexicans came up to work for me, and camped opposite my log cabin by the outcropping of what is known as the Diltz mine. Those men were experienced miners, and finding rich pocket specimens disintegrated from the vein, they traced it over the hill into Sherlock’s Gulch, finding “color” in nearly all the dirt taken from the vein. They further declared their belief that it was the mother vein of supply to the rich diggings in the gulch itself. Another party came later, and induced me to turn out all my men, some thirty at the time, to hunt for a “cavern of gold,” as it was described, said to have been found on the south side of Sherlock’s Gulch, but lost again in the dense thicket, in fleeing from the grizzlies. The tale seemed a little cranky, but my men appeared to believe in the honesty of our boy informant, and we toiled up and down that mountain side in line of battle, taking close observation till every foot of the surface was explored.

Our search resulted in the discovery of a vein of quartz, running nearly parallel with the gulch, but no pit, hole or cavern, and when the non existence of such a place was made evident to all of us, our Mexican youth with a simplicity to be found only among the gamins of our large cities, said: “Well, you have

earthquakes in California, and the hole must have been filled up.”

Sometime afterwards, I had the vein recorded, as it was gold bearing. The Mexican encampment at the Diltz mine, divided their force, some of them working for me in the placer claim, while others left for Saxton's creek, where they found ounce diggings, and the quartz vein, afterwards known as the Snyder vein. A few only remained to prospect the Diltz mine, which was done by erecting an arasta and grinding out the “pocket” they had discovered. When they left, another party of Mexicans, headed by a monte dealer from Quartzburg, found the vein on the lower Saxton's creek trail, a little north east of the Diltz mine. Champlin H. Spencer had a small party of Mexicans from Sonora, working for him, who first attracted his attention to the Spencer vein. Dr. John M. Crepelle, also had Mexicans working for him on Sherlock, who reported the quartz vein better than many worked in Mexico. Some of the doctor's men became dissatisfied and left him. In order to keep the others employed until diggings could be found, I allowed the doctor the free use of a small piece on my claim, out of which his men took the largest piece of pure gold (as far as known) ever taken from the southern mines. It weighed 9 pounds avoirdupois, while that taken out by Paddy McCann and Pat Hussey weighed but six.

Sometime previous to the quartz era inaugurated by “Quartz Johnson,” Thomas J. Whitlock with a party of men from Missouri had been persistently mining near the head of Sherlock's creek, but finding the lead run out, as they supposed, prospected the gulches tributary to what is now Whitlock's creek. Whitlock's men found rich diggings up the creek, and tracing “float” or ragged gold to the Whitlock vein, where convinced that it afforded the gold of their newly discovered placer. Taking the hint from this suggestion, outcroppings were traced over the ridge into the Fremont Estate, and at the foot of the hill along the trail to Mariposa, the same quality of gold was found, and in many instances after a heavy rain, gold was picked up from the surface. The Whitlock men finally made a record of their discovery, at which date your county records will show, but finding the cost of machinery too great for prudent investment of their hard earned gold they sold out their mine to me, and left for Missouri. About that time there was a quartz furore encouraged by the remarkable assay furnished us by the foreign and native Professors of San Francisco. Some of these assays proved that we had mines that would in some instances, yield us thousands of dollars per ton. One instance I remember where a metallurgist afterwards connected with the U.S. Mint at San Francisco, reported to me a yield of 12-1/2 cents per pound, for rock I never found a color in, nor could my expert Mexican miners discover any. A probable solution of the mystery was, that by some error, another specimen had been substituted for the one sent by myself.

What wonder that for a time in those early days, we had golden dreams, and went our bottom dollar on the prospect? Dr. Brunson, the first surgeon of the Mariposa battalion, brought over two or three of his negro slaves and first prospected the Spencer vein, but the encouragement received, held him but a short time, when he took his negroes and went back to his southern home. Captain Hawley was the first considerable worker in the quartz mining, and the first victim. His mill was put up at enormous expense to crush rock from Saxton's Creek mines, and afterwards, to work the Spencer vein. Another mill was put up by an ingenious mechanic, whose name I do not now recall, near the mouth of Saxton's creek. Captain Hawley failed to extract gold in paying quantities, and his mill of eight or nine stamps, was sold to the French company in which Spencer and myself unfortunately became interested. The superintendent of the company had been a Parisian sub editor, well versed in all that belonged to the opera-bouffe, or the comedie Francais, but gold quartz mining he knew absolutely nothing. Therefore, a Berlin Mining Engineer was employed at a salary of five hundred dollars per month, and a mechanical engineer and mill wright was also employed at a like salary and board, while the superintendent, bookkeeper, his body-servant and cook, probably required another thousand dollars a month for their

services.

The mill wright referred to in your article, was entirely secondary to the quartz crushing mill, and was a very ingenious contrivance of the French mechanician, which, though it cost a good deal, could never be made to work. As for the Spencer and Whitlock veins, though barely prospected by the company, they reported a large expenditure in building roads and in opening the mines for future economic exploration. I will dwell upon this part of the history of those mines further than to say, that the French company fulfilled none of the engagements. Spencer went to Paris and brought suite in the criminal court against the president of the company. It was proved that he was guilty of criminal mismanagement, and was rigorously punished after the summary methods of French law. He said in substance, that the only way to make money out of mining, was "to work the shares up and down." Spencer advised me of the situation, and when he wrote me, supposed he had reorganized the company upon an honest and solid basis. I was assured of being refunded any expense I might incur in keeping the mill and property intact for the share holders, and when attempt was made by the superintendent to place the property under a lease for a term of years, I levied a execution, and obtained a personal judgement for non fulfillment of contract. The mill property was sold on execution, and I bought it in. With a view of keeping up the work upon lodes or veins, I associated with me, in running the mill and working the mines, Charles Chapin, an engineer who had some experience at the Mt. Gaines mill. The expense of refitting the mill was greater than our combined capital would justify, and when we finally got to work, our expenses overran our receipts of gold. This was principally owing to the great cost of labor at that time, and the little preparation that had been made to extract the ore economically. I was encouraged to hope for succor, by receiving a letter from a special agent of the company, who had then just arrived in San Francisco. The agent wrote me to learn the situation, I replied by advising a continuance of his journey to the mines. The next steamer brought news of the disorganization of the company, and an entire abandonment of their California exploitation's in mines. I had pledged the mill property for money to pay sheriff's fees, and a personal fund of \$1,500 in San Francisco, I drew and paid what I esteemed debts of honor. As to the mill and mines, they were transferred, as if by earthquake, into other hands.

It has been said that the passion for gambling is incurable. I believe that, for mining is equally so. At all events, with the English maxim before me, that "it takes a mine to work a mine," had I the means to indulge in the excitement of the almost certain reward, I would organize a company to work all the mines on Whitlock's, Sherlock's and Saxton creeks, by erecting a water power mill, located at some suitable point on the Merced river, which might be occasionally supplied with ore by a narrow gauge railroad. Then the other difficulties which beset our pioneer attempts at mining would vanish before the improved methods of saving gold, diamond drills, compressed air and dynamite.

Yours truly,

L. H. Bunnell"

I have some speculation on who this Thomas Jefferson Whitlock was but at the moment it is pure speculation and has yet to be confirmed by any of the descendants of this part of the family.

In the 1850 census for Mariposa Co., California there is a Thos. J. Whitlock age 41 born in North Carolina. I would say it is fairly certain this is the Thomas Jefferson Whitlock who was mining for gold

in Mariposa in 1849. It is clear from the documents sent in by Matt Evans that Thomas was from Missouri as he mentions this several times and indicates that he returned to Missouri after selling the mine about 1852.

The only Thomas Jefferson Whitlock born in 1809 in North Carolina and living in Missouri is Thomas the son of Thomas Whitlock and Mary Ponsonbay. He was born in Surry Co., North Carolina November 20, 1809 and is living in Green Co., Missouri by 1832. The only anomaly is that he also shows in the 1850 census for Robinson, Green Co., Missouri. For this reason he had been discounted up until I received the additional details from Matt. There are just too many indications that fit for this Thomas not to be the most likely candidate.

This family is part of the WHITLOCK25 chart and I would be interested to hear from descendants of Thomas Jefferson Whitlock on this speculation.

Sources: X5446