

BRIDGEPORT TOLL TAKERS

Tolls were charged beginning with the first days of the Sparks Bridge across the South Yuba River at Bridgeport. Captain and Mrs. William Bates, on an excursion from San Francisco to French Corral, paid a dollar and a half toll to cross the Sparks Bridge in April 1851. That toll may have been collected by Urias and Emanuel Nye, the first non-native residents at Bridgeport.

Toll Takers:

Perkins Lafayette Hutchinson	1856-1864
Thomas William Milton Thompson	1865-1875
Gideon Hand Graves	1876-1899

Perkins Lafayette Hutchinson became the toll taker for David Wood in 1856 and continued through 1864. Wood had purchased the Sparks Bridge in 1855. Hutchinson, a native of Virginia, came overland to California in 1853 and worked in the Downeyville area before locating at the Point Defiance confluence of the South and Main Yuba River branches. He first helped Wood in road building at Point Defiance. Beginning in 1856 and for the next eight years through 1864, Hutchinson took tolls for the Virginia Turnpike Company, first at the Sparks Bridge and later at its replacement, the covered bridge, when the Sparks Bridge washed out in the storm of early 1862. He operated from Wood's store near the bridge and exchanged nuggets and gold dust for supplies and bridge passage. Hutchinson was said to have an 'elephant gun' to discourage robbers, which were common. A family story relates that he would hide the gold in a nearby chicken coop. Hutchinson had married Elizabeth Cheatham in 1861, and he moved to a ranch in the Erle district of Yuba County in 1864.



Perkins L. Hutchinson, circa 1855

Thomas William Milton Thompson was born October 14, 1827 in Campbell County, Virginia. He was Jane Wood's (David Wood's wife) nephew. His father was Jane's brother, Daniel Evans Thompson. The Calumet Township, Pike County, Missouri 1850 census shows Thomas had gone "to the mines." As the census was as of June 1 and the enumeration done on October 19, Thomas would have left for the California mines sometime between June 1 and October 19. In 1855 Thompson was elected Treasurer of the Virginia Turnpike Company. Thompson is listed on the 1870 Bridgeport Township (French Corral) Census as Toll Keeper and as a registered voter at French Corral in 1877. The next census entry is for Caleb Cooley, Sophrana Cooley and M. Cooley who probably were living in David Wood's old house located at today's North Parking Lot. So we can presume Thompson was living nearby to Cooley and on the north side of the river. David Wood hired Perkins Lafayette Hutchinson as toll taker from 1856 to 1864. Charles Cole hired Gideon Hand Graves as toll taker from 1876 to 1899. That leaves the period from 1865 to 1875, and it is likely, that Thomas Thompson was the toll taker then. Thompson married Bridget Victoria Evans at Campbell County, VA, and they had a daughter in 1862. Bridget died shortly after the birth due to tuberculosis, and the child died soon thereafter as well. Both are buried in California. Before 1880 Thompson returned to Virginia and married Ann Isabella Evans. Together they had six children. Isabella died in 1902 and Thomas died April 14, 1898 in Campbell County, Virginia.

Gideon Hand Graves became the toll taker for the Virginia Turnpike Company in 1876 and continued through 1899. He and Charles Cole, owner at Bridgeport, had filed a placer mining claim in 1878. Later, Graves deeded his share of the claim to Cole in return for 'care, shelter and maintenance' from the Cole family. When Graves died in 1900 he was buried in the Thompson, Cole (later Kneebone) Cemetery.