

TAPE #45

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Reference: The Kennedy Wheels

(Do you think an attempt to put the Kennedy Wheels on the National Register should also include the containment dam?)

Yes, I do. Both should be included.

(Do you know the history behind the sale of the Kennedy Mine?)

The city accepted the Wheels from the County. The County owned them and didn't want to bother with them, and the city offered to take them over and they gave them to Jackson.

(But how did the County get possession?)

Two of the wheels were a gift from Mr. Uty, who owned the mine at that time. That was the wheels, two of them, and only the ground they were standing on; no extra ground was given to them. Then, several years later, at the time the county accepted the wheels, my brother in law was Supervisor of the mine. Later my husband was supervisor, and that was when the county bought #3 and #4. And three acres of land was included. (I believe she means that her relatives were county supervisors, not mine supervisors.) In the meantime, ~~XX~~ Uty had sold all that property to Whitman and Sullivan. Then, when the city got this grant money; no, it was bond money, I think in 1960 so much money was voted for historical preservation. Well, this county's share of that was 75,000 dollars. That would have been

real good to put on the wheels, but the supervisors decided that each area should put in a bid for a certain amount of that. Well, the only two that came up with anything was Jackson for the Wheels and Ione for their city park. So they split the money. Jackson got 37,500 dollars. Then, there was an extra amount, an extra 5000 dollars coming, so the city got a total of 42,500. Most of that was spent to acquire extra acreage so as to include the dam. I ~~think~~ think their reason for doing that was that they thought the state might take it over as a state park, and they needed that much acreage to qualify. I don't know if that was a good idea or not, but you need a lot of money to keep the wheels in order.

They built the parking lot that is near the wheels, and some money was spent on the wheels themselves. I think they spent money on 1 and 2. There had been some money spent on 4 a few years back, about 4600 dollars, I think, but the foundation timbers were bad. Another thing that came out of that bond money was the rest rooms. And the tables and kiosk, and all that. I think that was all in order to qualify as a state park. So far they have not, but I don't know if they have really tried.

(I wonder what happened to all the mine records?)

I doubt if the records of the mine exist, at least in any numbers. There is a man in Sacramento, Mr. Uty, who would have some. But I doubt that there are any. There was so much vandalism at the building, papers were taken out of the files and scattered all over. I don't know if Mr. Uty kept anything at all on the wheels, but it would be worth a try.

(What can you tell me about your husband and his relationship to the wheels?)

Well, I was unaware of the wheels until my husband went to work there to make some repairs on the wheels. Nothing had been done on them for a long time. See, for the years before he went there, the Kennedy was only running ten stamps. I don't think they were even making ends meet. This was during the 30's. They closed in January of 1942.

I went with him one time to hold the tape line. We went inside one of the buildings and I was just amazed. I remember that they were so sloppy. All this muck was dripping everywhere, and splattering out of the bucket and into the flume. It was just a real gloomy looking place.

(How long did he work for the Kennedy?)

Not too long. He worked a couple of times for them; maybe two or three years in all. His job was to keep them from falling apart, and to spend as little as possible. If they were only running ten stamps, they didn't want to spend much money.

The north shaft was their exit shaft and air shaft, and it was in bad shape; he worked for a time on that.

The head repair man on any job was called the master mechanic.

And he would work with the master mechanic, replacing a lot of things like the timbers and all; then long after the mine had closed down they told him he could have any of the timbers around the shaft that he wanted. This was in about 1954. So we built a house on New York Ranch Road made out of them. All the stringers were timbers from the north shaft.

(Why do you think the Kennedy Wheels should be on the National Register?)

For one thing, they are the only such system used in California. There was a system used, I believe, in Montana. And I've been told there is a system like it in South Africa, but I don't really know. Their uniqueness would be a main point. That kind of system is not needed any more, because now you have pumps. But then the pumps they had couldn't handle moving that material. They weren't constructed to move those fine rock particles which would tear them apart. So, there will never be another occasion to use wheels to lift the tailings. The engineering angle of it is something else again. No one who was an engineer could figure how a 25 horse power motor could operate each wheel. My husband said it was a certain kind of friction clutch that they had. Once you got them started it took very little power to keep the momentum going. But it took a lot to get them started.

Then there was another angle that he told me about. The belt had such a long contact with the wheel or pulley. They used what they called an idler; and instead of the belt leaving the pulley, it came down and passed through this clamp that held it to the wheel. This way there was more contact with the pulley. And the ratio of the pulleys meant a lot too. All this accounted for the fact that they could use such a small motor.

The man who designed them was an engineer, and he went up to Montana and looked at those wheels. Then he came home and designed these. The clever thing was that there were two hills that the tailings

had to be lifted over. You lifted it over the first hill, but by the time you got it to the next hill you had lost a lot of elevation. So they just gained a few feet of elevation each time. But he had to figure this out! It was a very complex problem.

(What happened to the tailings when they left the last wheel?)

They entered a flume that dropped to the containment dam. The dam was designed so that the water would go through, but the tailings would remain behind. Later, they added a spillway, because it was getting so full, that maybe the opening at the bottom of the dam couldn't take care of it. My husband worked on the spillway that they put in. I think that was about 1929.

(When did the building that covered the wheels come down?)

A man bought them and tore off the metal that covered them. He sold the corrugated iron for scrap right after the war started. Chuck Fuller was the man who bought them. Then, they set one on fire and tried to burn it down. I don't know if his crew did that or the Company. Some people say they cleaned up a little gold there when they tore the building down. They had what they called a sump for the spillage to go into, and I was told they when they cleaned the stuff out of that sump they made a little money.

(Didn't anyone make an attempt to stop them from tearing down the buildings?)

No. It was hard to get the county to even buy them. And they didn't want to spend any money on them. Everyone said they're wooden, and in time they're gonna fall down, and thats that!

But my husband's theory was that if they spent from 500 to 1000 dollars a year on them, that they wouldn't fall down. A couple of times my husband and another man went out there and put some kind of preservative on them, that only cost five or six hundred dollars---then.

1 is standing, and so is 4. 2 and 3 have fallen down. You can walk to all of them, and then down to the dam.

My husband was interested in anything connected with the mines from the historical standpoint. He worked on enough of them, but he did very little work underground.

Another important thing about the wheels, is that they were an early environmental project. You see, before the wheels, all the tailings were dumped into the streams. The muck would up down in Jackson Valley. There were law suits going all over the place. But the Mill for the Argonaut Mine was up high enough that they simply relied on gravity for their tailings. You can still see the tailings if you drive along Argonaut Lane.

One of the worst areas for poluting the streams was on the Yuba River; they used hydraulic mining. They dumped whole hills into the streams. Finally, in 1912, legislation was passed, and the Kennedy had to get rid of the tailings properly or close up. The Ziela Mine simply closed down because of the new law.