

## Charles Frederick Hoffman, civil engineer

Carl Friedrich Hoffman was born 29 April 1838 in Frankfurt am Main, Hessen-Nassau, Prussia (now Germany). He was the son of Georg Jacob Hoffmann and Maria Elisabetha Hanso.<sup>1</sup> He attended university in Europe<sup>2</sup> before immigrating to America in August 1857. He traveled through Havre, France, on the ship *Areal*, landing in New York. In America, he was usually known as Charles F Hoffman. He resided in New York for a short time and then moved to California.<sup>3</sup>

In 1857, Charles became a topographer for the Frederick Lander's survey of the Rocky Mountains. He came to California in 1858 and was recruited by Josiah Whitney to join the California Geological Survey as a topographer.<sup>4</sup>

In 1860 he was a draftsman living in San Francisco in the home of Charles H Clark.<sup>5</sup> He helped explore the Sierra Nevada Mountains from 1860-1870 and again in 1873-1874. He was on the survey team that made the first ascent on Mount Brewer, Mount Dana, Mount Silliman and Tower Peak. Mount Hoffmann, a high peak in central Yosemite National Park, is named after him.<sup>6</sup>

In January 1870, he married Lucy Mayotta Browne in Alameda, California.<sup>7</sup> Lucy's father, John Ross Browne, was the US Minister to China<sup>8</sup> and a rich man in Oakland. At his death, there was \$10,984.27 in gold coin, as well as land, to distribute among his descendants.<sup>9</sup>

In 1870, Charles was a civil engineer, living in San Francisco in the home of his brother, who was also a civil engineer.<sup>10</sup> In September 1870, Charles was naturalized as a citizen in San Francisco, California.<sup>11</sup> In 1871, the Echo District mill at the Butte mine in Nevada burned down in 1871 and was rebuilt. In the fall of 1872, Charles sold the property to San Francisco financiers for \$80,000 and was put in charge of the renamed Rye-Patch Silver Mining Company (Mining Industry of the States and Territories of the Rocky Mountains, by Rossiter Worthington Raymond, 1874, p. 156; Statistics of Mines and Mining in the States and Territories West of the Rocky Mountains, 1873, p. 156).

From 1871 to 1872, Charles was a professor of Topographical Engineering at Harvard University. He instructed a Surveying and Topographical Drawing class for mining students.<sup>12</sup>

About 1876, Mr. Shepard brought some samples from Silver Reef to merchant Hyman Jacobs, who sent them to Charles in San Jose, California. Charles, accompanied by Professor Louis Janney, came to Pioche and Jacobs took them to Silver Reef. They brought samples to be assayed by A. H. Emanuel. The assays ran so high that Charles and the professor thought they had been salted, so they arranged to re-assay the samples. Emanuel walked out and they took possession of the assay office. Their results practically checked with Emanuel's assays.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Deutschland Geburten und Taufen, 1558-1898.

<sup>2</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, 14 November 1896, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> US Passport Applications, 1795-1925.

<sup>4</sup> *Wikipedia.org*

<sup>5</sup> United States Census, 1860.

<sup>6</sup> *Wikipedia.org*

<sup>7</sup> California Marriages, 1850-1945.

<sup>8</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, 25 November 1896, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> *Oakland Tribune*, 15 November 1879, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> United States Census, 1870.

<sup>11</sup> California, Northern US District Court Naturalization Index, 1852-1989.

<sup>12</sup> Report of the President of Harvard College and Reports of Departments, 1872, pp. 4, 12.

<sup>13</sup> Utah State Historical Society, Vol 5, No 1, pp. 79-80.

Hyman then negotiated the sale of the Leeds claim to Charles for \$40,000. He also purchased the Maggie mill at Bullionville, Nevada, and had the mill, both machinery and building, moved to Silver Reef. The Leeds Mining and Milling Company was organized. Charles always wanted the best, and once said to Hyman, "came to prices. He would say to his friend Hyman Jacobs: "Raise the price of powder and fuse; mark up the price of candles two dollars a box. You may need the money. The Leeds Company is producing big." When cord wood was offered at \$5.00 per cord he said, "That is too cheap. I am willing to pay \$8.00 but I want the best."<sup>14</sup>

By 1881 the Leeds Mining and Milling Company was already starting to fail. That year it issued an assessment of 25 cents per share in an effort to repair its mill and infuse new life into the company. Additional problems plagued the mill and by June 1882 the company was bankrupt, and its assets passed into the hands of the county sheriff. It had produced almost \$800,000 of silver in the first twenty months of operation.<sup>15</sup>

From 1875 through 1881, Charles was listed as deputy for various mines in Nevada in the report of the Secretary of the Interior. Some of the mines were the Comstock, Gold Hill, and Bonanza.<sup>16</sup> On the 1880 census, he was a mining surveyor, living in Oakland with his wife and four sons.<sup>17</sup>

In 1885, Charles was superintendent of the Golden River Drift Mine (better known as the Red Point mine) in Forest Hill Divide, Placer, California, which were owned by a French syndicate.<sup>18</sup> A drift mine runs a tunnel horizontally rather than vertically. The tunnel was run for 1800 feet before the channel of ore was encountered; eventually the channel was two miles long. The tunnel was run by power drills and a large compressor; ventilation was furnished by a Baker blower run by water.<sup>19</sup> In 1902, the compressor broke down and horses were used to haul the gravel cars the 1.5 miles.<sup>20</sup>

He was outspoken and decisive on the subject of making mining a department of the government. He said, "Mining is one of the greatest and most important industries of our country. Millions on millions of capital are invested in it. I regard it fully as important as agriculture, for out of the mines comes not only money but various widespread industries."<sup>21</sup> The initial bill fell through in Congress, but another attempt was made which was successful. "The next thing most necessary is that we should have ... a Secretary of the Bureau of Mining."<sup>22</sup>

In 1887, Charles is reported as the owner of the Comet and Eclipse mines in Placer, California.<sup>23</sup> In 1888, the new Miners' Union demanded the discharge all Chinese miners from area mines, "or at least employ not more than one Chinaman to each white man". They also demanded that all white men not members of the union be discharged, which at some mines would be practically every man. Charles received an anonymous letter warning him to get rid of his Chinese, and the letter contained a match; his local Chinese community was also threatened. The mine superintendents refused to

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> *Silver, Sinners and Saints*, by Proctor and Shirts, pp. 171–75; "Historical Study of Silver Reef," by Stucki, pp. 88–89.

<sup>16</sup> Report of the Commissioner of the General Land Office, 1875, 1877, 1878, 1879, 1880, 1881.

<sup>17</sup> United States Census, 1880.

<sup>18</sup> *San Francisco Call*, 14 November 1896, p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> *The Record-Union* [Sacramento], 8 July 1897, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, 24 May 1902, p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> *San Francisco Call*, 14 November 1896, p. 7.

<sup>22</sup> *San Francisco Call*, 10 November 1896, p. 14.

<sup>23</sup> *The Record-Union* [Sacrament], 19 July 1887, p. 3.

accede to the demands and prepared for trouble; more than a hundred deputy sheriffs were prepared to be sworn in as needed.<sup>24</sup>

Over the next two decades, Charles applied for passports to go abroad several times. He went abroad in 1889 and 1896, then to Berlin and Russia in 1900, and Alaska in 1903. His passport described him as 5 feet 5  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches tall; with brown eyes, graying brown hair, a beard; of dark complexion, and having a round face.<sup>25</sup>

In the 1890s, Charles was heavily involved in the California Miners' Association and attended conventions and meetings at the State Mining Bureau in San Francisco.<sup>26</sup> In 1894, the Drill Tournament of Miners was held at the State Miners' Association in San Francisco. A mineral exposition attracted the most visitors, but the prize hand-drilling tournament was also a great draw. Charles was one of the judges for the drilling competition.<sup>27</sup>

In 1896, Charles, a "well-known California mining expert", accepted a position with the Exploration Company of London, England. With his professional education in mining, 25 years of experience, and as a member of the executive committee of the California Miners' Association, he was the perfect choice for the company. He was regarded as an authority on drift mining and has written a pamphlet on that subject.<sup>28</sup>

The world-famous Exploration Company of London was the largest and richest mining concern in the world, backed by Rothschilds, who had invested \$50 million in American mines in the previous year.<sup>29</sup> Only Russians are permitted to own gold mines, so the Exploration Company of London has formed a combination with the Russian Privy Bank of St Petersburg.<sup>30</sup>

Charles was to go to Russia and other countries to report on and operate the auriferous gravel beds acquired by the London company.<sup>31</sup> He was under contract for three years and would receive an annual salary of \$15,000 (and expenses). His son Ross also went, with a salary of \$1,800 per year.<sup>32</sup> In 1897, he was in Siberia.<sup>33</sup> He and his son returned in 1899, having also been to the Argentine Republic. They traveled about 70,000 miles on their tour.<sup>34</sup>

On the 1900 census, Charles was listed as a mining engineer, living in Oakland, Alameda, California, with his wife, four sons, brother- and sister-in-law, and one niece.<sup>35</sup> In 1903, Charles, as agent for the *Societe Anonyme des Miners de Golden River*, filed protests against timber-land applicants, arguing that the tracts were more valuable for mineral than for timber or agricultural purposes, that they embrace mining claims, and they are situated in one of the richest mineral belts in the state. He stated that they wanted the land not for timber, but with the design of fraudulently acquiring mineral land. The decision was in favor of the mining claims.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *The Record-Union* [Sacramento], 28 July 1888, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> U.S. Passport Applications, 1795-1925.

<sup>26</sup> *Oakland Tribune*, 24 December 1891, p. 1; *San Francisco Call*, 25 July 1895, p. 4; *San Francisco Chronicle*, 21 November 1894, p. 5; 8 November 1896, p. 28.

<sup>27</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, 23 May 1894, p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> *San Francisco Call*, 11 November 1896, p. 1; 14 November 1896, p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> *San Francisco Call*, 14 November 1896, p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, 14 November 1896, p. 13.

<sup>31</sup> *San Francisco Call*, 14 November 1896, p. 7.

<sup>32</sup> *San Francisco Chronicle*, 14 November 1896, p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> *San Francisco Call*, 3 October 1897, p. 30.

<sup>34</sup> *Oakland Tribune*, 20 September 1899, p. 8.

<sup>35</sup> United States Census, 1900.

<sup>36</sup> *Mining and Scientific Press*, 1907, Vol 95, pp. 123-4.

In 1907, a letter from the Secretary of the Interior to the Commissioner of the General Land Office reviewed litigation over mineral tracts in Placer, California and reversed the decision of the commissioner in regard to the conflict over timber vs. mineral development. One of the protestants in the case was Charles F Hoffman, representing the French company operating at Red Point.<sup>37</sup>

In 1910, he appears to be retired and living on his “own income” in Oakland, with his wife and two sons who are also mining engineers. Charles died 20 June 1913 in Alameda, California. His wife Lucy died in 1926.<sup>38</sup> He was “one of the most prominent mining men in California”<sup>39</sup> and an engineer of reputation and one of a family long identified with progressive mining methods in California.<sup>40</sup> He was on the faculty at University of California, and his granddaughter Joan LeConte Hoffman was the 22<sup>nd</sup> person from the family to attend that university.<sup>41</sup>



Members of the California Geological Survey, about 1862; Charles Hoffman is third from the right (Image from [researcharchive.calacademy.org](http://researcharchive.calacademy.org))

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<sup>37</sup> Mining and Scientific Press, 1907, Vol 95, p. 123.

<sup>38</sup> California Death Index, 1905-1939.

<sup>39</sup> *San Francisco Call*, 14 November 1896, p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> Mining and Scientific Press, 1907, Vol 95, p. 123.

<sup>41</sup> *Long Beach Independent*, 24 December 1943, p. 31.



Charles F. Hoffman (Image from San Francisco Call, 14 November 1896, p. 7)



Charles F Hoffman (Image from *Wikipedia.org*)