Horace King was born a slave on September 8, 1807, in the Cheraw district of South Carolina. King worked with his owner John Godwin on the construction of public projects. He moved to Girard, Alabama, (present-day Phenix City) in 1832, where he stayed until the early 1870s.

King and Godwin introduced Georgia, Alabama and Mississippi to a type of bridge design that employed the Town Lattice Truss. King is also said to have originated what is commonly known as inserted saw teeth and ran the first sawmill in the South by the new process.

The first bridge built in Alabama by King was the Dillingham Street Bridge across the Chattahoochee River between Girard and Columbus, Georgia, in 1832-33. He later built at least a dozen covered road and railroad bridges across the Chattahoochee River.

King also built numerous other bridges in Alabama, including the first crossing of the Black Warrior River at Tuscaloosa in 1835. King built more covered bridges in Alabama and Georgia than any other individual.

In 1939 King married Frances Thomas, the daughter of a free woman of color. Between 1843 and 1850 the couple had four sons and one daughter.

King’s precise contribution to the design modifications evident over the years in Godwin’s bridges can only be speculated upon. However, the bridges King supervised contained additional intermediate chords, a feature that strengthened the trusses against twisting with age. Some of King’s bridges also contained pier foundations formed by combining sand with timbers of heart pine. Also improved over time were the procedures King employed in erecting and assembling vast trusses over water without power machinery.

King also constructed many public buildings, factories and houses. Between 1850 and 1851 he participated in the construction of the new Alabama State Capitol. It is suggested that the double staircase and much of the superstructure of the capitol were his work. King was emancipated from slavery in 1846. After being emancipated, King continued his work with Godwin and eventually took over the business as Godwin’s health declined. He also served as a representative for Russell County in the Alabama Legislature, where he received praises from many of his fellow legislators.

In 1873 King moved to LaGrange, Georgia, where he continued his construction work with his four sons.

King was one of the first persons of African descent who rose to prominence by force of genius and character.

He died in LaGrange, Georgia, on May 28, 1885, at the age of 77.