

Appendix A



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Historic Resources

A.01 HISTORIC RESOURCES

A.01.01 History of Folsom

The earliest recorded inhabitants of Folsom were members of the Nisenan Maidu people who lived on the lands drained by the American, Bear, Yuba and southern branch of the Feather rivers. Most habitation sites were transitory as the Maidu were hunters and gatherers who moved from place to place as game and plant materials were available.

Ethnographers have placed one of their permanent villages called Yodok (Yudok) either on the south side of the river above Negro Bar or on the north side of the river near the Cliff House restaurant. Salmon from the river, oak trees and game from the surrounding forest and oak trees were plentiful in this location. The acorn from various species of oaks was the staple of their diet. The granite grinding rocks seen through the region are one of our few permanent reminders of this way of life. Natives made hollows in granite outcroppings, and using heavy pieces of granite or other stones, pounded the acorns into a flour. This acorn flour was used to make an Indian bread and many other products to see the Maidu through the winter months.

The Maidu populations were greatly diminished with the arrival of Euro-Americans in this area as the natives had no immunity to many of the diseases which came with the new immigrants. Childhood diseases, such as measles and chicken pox, were lethal and spread through whole villages leaving few survivors. The discovery of gold further diminished the Indian population when they were driven from their land and their hunting grounds were disturbed.

The earliest written record concerning Folsom goes back to the "Diary of Ensign Gabriel Moraga's Expeditions of Discovery in the Sacramento Valley" where an entry described a visit to this area in October 1808. The second Euro-American known to have visited the Folsom area was Jedediah Smith, who camped in the area in April 1827 with a group of trappers.

The first man to play a part in the establishment of the City of Folsom was William Alexander Leidesdorff. Leidesdorff was born in the Danish West Indies in 1810. His father was Danish and his mother was an Islander of African ancestry. Leidesdorff arrived in California in 1840 and in eight short years rose to become one of the most prominent men in the state. He was a successful merchant and trader in San Francisco, who acquired large parcels of land in that city before the discovery of gold escalated land prices. He served as a member of the City Council and School Committee. He served as Town Treasurer and Vice Consul for the U. S. in San Francisco.

In August 1844 Leidesdorff, a naturalized Mexican citizen, petitioned Governor Micheltorena for a land grant of 8 sq. leagues on the banks of the American River adjoining the property of John Sutter. The grant, which included the areas of present day Rancho Cordova and Folsom, was issued and Leidesdorff took possession of 35,521 acres of land, called Rio de los Americanos.

Leidesdorff died suddenly four years later at the age of 38 and was buried at Mission Dolores with elaborate ceremony. The cities of Folsom and San Francisco have recognized him with streets named in his honor, and today he is remembered as one of the most prominent Afro-American men in early California history.

Leidesdorff had no family in California and left no will. Joseph Folsom, a West Point graduate, was a captain in the Quartermaster Corps stationed in San Francisco in 1848. He began buying property himself in the city as land prices were beginning to rise after the discovery of gold in the Sierra foothills. After the Leidesdorff estate had been inventoried, Folsom decided to find Leidesdorff's heirs and buy the estate in early 1849. He traveled first to New York to arrange financing, and then on to St. Croix where Leidesdorff's family lived. Folsom agreed to pay \$70,000 for the estate with \$5,000.00 as a down payment and the remainder in 2 later installments. When the heirs learned of the value of the estate, they refused to accept further payments and would not give Folsom title to the property. A sensational trial in 1851 gave Folsom the property, but it took another 3 years before he could establish title to Rancho de los Americanos. While Folsom was securing legal title to the property, he began making plans for development of his holdings, which held an unknown amount of gold.

Sometime in 1849, gold was discovered at Negro Bar just below Folsom's historic district on the banks of the American River. The gravel bar extended about 9/10 of a mile west from the vicinity of present day Rainbow Bridge and was first mined by Afro-Americans. Later court records indicate one of these miners was Samuel Smith. No other records can be found to tell us more about these early miners. By 1850 a hotel and store were constructed by James S. Meredith near present day Burnett and Forrest Streets, and census records for that year list about 700 inhabitants of Negro Bar.

The "Diary of H. B. Scharmann" gives us one of the few firsthand accounts of Negro Bar:

"After I had gone twenty-five miles [from Sacramento] I found a great bank, also called a bar, where three hundred men were busily washing gold. There was a prospect here for a diligent worker to earn five dollars a day.

. . . Illnesses were frequent and I witnessed many deaths. . . . The heat which sometimes reached one hundred and twenty degrees, was unbearable during the day, but the nights were cool and gave us a chance to get . . . sleep. . . . Here we lived, sheltered by the trees; many had no tents and built themselves . . . huts made of leaves."

Soon the easy gold deposits were gone. In August 1950, Scharmann describes the formation of a company of 260 people to dig a canal to harvest gold from a dried riverbed.

The Virginia Mining Company was formed to split the expense of this effort. Shares were purchased in the form of labor or wages for labor. Scharmann's sons were laborers and he himself paid wages. A tremendous amount of physical exertion was necessary and many became ill due to the oppressive summer heat and poor diet. On October 8th, the dam and canal were complete, but the dam broke the next morning. Mining ceased for the winter, and many miners left to look elsewhere. Flooding followed the next spring and Scharmann soon left to explore for gold around Nevada City. In 1853 the remnants of the Virginia Mining Company were sold to Amos P. Catlin for \$900.00. Catlin brought a more reliable water source to the area, and mining by his company continued until 1855, when it is estimated a total of \$2,000,000.00 in gold had been removed from the gravel of Negro Bar.

The constant movement of men and supplies to and from the mining camps was a nightmare in the early days, as few roads existed and those that did exist were nothing more than dirt paths. In July 1849 the first passenger stage line was initiated by James E. Birch to take passengers from Sutter's Fort to Coloma on Sutter's old supply road to his saw mill. In the spring of 1852, however, the American River rose 31 feet above normal and overflowed its banks, causing massive flooding in Sacramento, and outlying mining camps were cut off from supplies. In response to the need for more reliable transportation, the Sacramento Valley Railroad was formed in August 1852 to better move people and goods to the gold fields.

Shortly after its reorganization in 1853 Joseph Folsom became an officer of the Sacramento Valley Railroad as more than half the proposed route would run through his property. The new officers decided that they needed an experienced civil engineer to guide the project, and Theodore Judah, who had experience in railroad construction in New York State, was brought to Sacramento to survey a route between Sacramento and Negro Bar. After Folsom obtained clear title to his land grant from the Board of Land Commissioner in 1854, construction of the railroad began. Train service to Negro Bar began in February 1856, making it the first railroad west of the Mississippi River. Due to cost overruns, however, plans for further line expansion were abandoned.

Two other companies were formed in 1857 and 1859 to expand rail service from Negro Bar across the river to Marysville and Auburn respectively. A trestle rail bridge was constructed in 1858, and track was laid for several miles but these endeavors were short lived. The mighty Central Pacific Railroad bought out these 2 lines in the 1860s to eliminate competition and secure its preferred route across the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Track north of the river was ripped up and used to expand the Sacramento Valley line to Placerville as the Placerville and Sacramento Valley Railroad Company. Most of the old rail beds disappeared with recent development, but the name of the railroad settlement where the 2 lines met survives in the Ashland Station shopping center. The old wooden mortise and tenon jointed station or storage building which was constructed in 1858 has also survived and was moved by the City to the railroad block where it sits today. Based upon recent studies, the "Ashland Station" has been confirmed as the oldest standing railroad structure in the western United States and is eligible to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Central Pacific also bought out the old Sacramento Valley Railroad Company and moved the equipment and repair shops to Sacramento. Activity at the railroad block remained low until after refrigerated rail cars were introduced and many packing sheds were constructed for the shipment of local produce to markets all over the country. Passenger rail service was discontinued by World War II and freight service died out by the 1970s. It is hoped that some historic rail service may be restored as a result of this plan and the railroad block may become a busy transportation hub again.

In early 1855 Folsom hired Judah to lay out a townsite at Negro Bar. The townsite was located above the river to avoid earlier flooding problems and consisted of 98 blocks with the railroad block as the focal point. Joseph Folsom died suddenly in July 1855 at the age of 38 just months before the railroad reached his townsite and lots to his new town were sold. Residents renamed the town in his honor. Although his estate was valued in the millions, litigation over the Leidesdorff estate was not concluded, and much of his land in San Francisco and Sacramento County was occupied by squatters. His estate was consumed by litigation costs and poor administration. His mother and sisters back in New Hampshire saw little of wealth. He was buried with full military honors in San Francisco.

By the time train service began in 1856 there were 100 buildings in the new town of Folsom with most constructed around the railroad block. Stage and freight lines fanned out from Folsom to the mining camps of the Sierras and later the Comstock Lode in Virginia City, Nevada. As the mining at Negro Bar disappeared, the town of Folsom took over as a transportation hub for the region.

The Central Overland Pony Express lasted only 18 months, beginning in April 1860 but changed communication in the United States forever as it linked California and the other Western States with the rest of the country. The young men who carried the mail on horseback greatly reduced delivery time and helped to maintain California's ties with the Union in the months preceding the Civil War. For 12 of the months, the western terminus of the line was in Folsom on the site of the present Folsom History Museum. Mail was taken from the rider and delivered across the street to the railroad for a trip to Sacramento where it was transferred to steamer for the final leg of the trip to San Francisco.

By 1870 the local economy changed. The railroad shut down its shops and moved the machinery to Sacramento. The completion of the transcontinental railroad moved many transportation links elsewhere, and several fires in the commercial district destroyed many businesses. The town's economy returned to agriculture and mining to provide employment.

The leader in both of these endeavors was the Natoma Water and Mining Company which was formed in 1851 by Amos P. Catlin of Mormon Island to deliver water to seasonal or "dry digging" sites. The company proposed to divert water from the American River in El Dorado County and bring year round water to the mining areas down stream by use of canals. In June 1853 the company was formally incorporated as the Natoma Water and Mining Company with the express purpose to:

“construct a canal commencing from a point near Rocky Bar upon the south fork of the American River about two miles above Salmon Falls ...and running from thence down leading water by means of canals, flumes, aqueducts, reservoirs, pipes and other necessary conduits to the gold bearing regions and the agricultural grounds and inhabited districts in the vicinity of McDowell Hill, Red Banks, Mormon Island, Willow Springs, Rhodes Diggings, Prairie Diggings, Alder Creek, Negro Bar, Texas Hill, Mississippi Bar, Pennsylvania Flats and to all other places being adjacent to the route of said canal or any of its branches and to all such places as the said water may be conveyed to by said canal, or for any of the branches or extensions for the purpose of using and selling the said water for manufacturing, mining, mechanical, chemical, agricultural or domestic purposes.”

The canal or, as it is locally known, the “ditch,” brought new life to mining areas of Folsom and nearby El Dorado County. Farmers such as Jacob and Oswald Broder were able to diversify into orchards and vineyards, and the Mette family began the Red Bank winery. With this success under their belt, Catlin and his partners formed the American River Water and Mining Company in 1854, which built the North Fork canal using the same diversion and construction methods on the North Fork of the American River below Auburn to serve what is now northeast Folsom, Orangevale, and Fair Oaks. Unlike many other water companies of the time that had difficulty staying afloat with the rising need for capital investment, control remained local and in the hands of Catlin and his chief engineer and superintendent, Augustus T. Arrowsmith. Under their guidance, the Natoma Company purchased a major portion of the Rio de los Americanos land grant from the Folsom estate with early company income and turned handsome profits from land speculation.

In 1864, one of the company shareholders, Horatio G. Livermore, purchased controlling interest in the company and diversified the company as water sales to mining camps were decreasing and increased maintenance of the system was eroding profits. Under Livermore, the Natoma Company began moving into agriculture and moved its main offices to present day Nimbus near its vineyard. By 1885 over 2,000 acres were planted, and its “Flame Tokay” grapes were shipped all over the country. By that same year, the company had 300 acres in orchards and 800 acres planted in hay and grain. A large experimental nursery was maintained on the river side of Folsom Boulevard, near present day Natoma Station Subdivision, where different products were grown for planting on the company’s agricultural lands and to promote the sale of agricultural land. The Shepherders’ Inn on Folsom Boulevard in Rancho Cordova was later built by the Natoma Company to house out-of-town company officials and potential purchasers of Natoma property.

At the same time, Livermore began to increase the capacity of his water delivery system. In 1868 he caused a new masonry dam to be constructed above Salmon Falls to replace the old timber works. This dam was 16 ft. high and stood until the Army Corps of Engineers demolished it in 1959 because it was a boating hazard on Folsom Lake. A new “High Flume” was built across New York Ravine. All usable timber from the old flume was split into grape stakes for the vineyard. By 1880 the improvements were completed, and the ditch system was expanded.

Back in the 1850s much of the labor to construct the ditches and conduits was performed by the miners themselves, and they received water at their claims in exchange for construction. Euro-American miners received the equivalent of \$3.00 a day, and Asian miners, mostly Chinese, received \$1.00 a day. By the early 1860s the initial gold rush was over and individual claims were abandoned. Racial tensions increased as Chinese came to Folsom to rework old abandoned claims. Natoma Company records make note in 1858 that all the Chinese miners at Alder Creek had been driven from their claims. Many were forced to go to work for Anglo-owned companies that were themselves reworking old claims. During the 1860s a foreign miner's tax was imposed and the County Sheriff, James McClatchy, arrived in town to confiscate tools and claims to collect the tax. The Natoma Company obtained an injunction against such action after repeated attempts to collect the tax from its Chinese workers.

Chinese merchants and tradesmen are recorded in the Folsom area from the days of Negro Bar, and a thriving Chinese community grew around the old Negro Bar settlement and expanded east along River Way to the area of the present day hotel on Leidesdorff Street. As stronger anti-Chinese laws were passed in the 1880s and 1890s, immigration from China dropped dramatically and Chinese from the region moved to Folsom. Although anti-Chinese sentiments ran high in the Anglo community, there was little violence, and merchants in Chinatown continued to prosper with the new influx of customers. Work was available with the Natoma Company and other Anglo companies, and many Chinese were able to form their own companies to reclaim parcels abandoned by Anglo miners. By the turn of the century only a handful of placer mines were left in the area, and dredgers put an end to individual and small mining companies.

By the 1920s there were few Chinese left in Folsom when Wing Sing Wo, a long-time merchant, was buried in one of the three Chinese cemeteries that existed in Folsom. Oak Chan School is named for one of the earliest Chinese settlers, who arrived possibly as early as 1852 and rose to prominence in the Chinese community. His grandchildren are merchants and educators in the city.

Although the Natoma Company continued to employ local residents as a major component of its work force, Livermore turned to the State of California for a new source of labor to proceed with his vision of hydroelectric power and industry in Folsom. In 1868 Livermore approached the State with an offer of 350 acres to construct a new prison to relieve overcrowding at San Quentin. In exchange for the land, Livermore would receive the use of prison labor to construct a dam across the American River in the canyon just upstream from Folsom townsite, a flume, and later a hydroelectric power plant (constructed in 1895). An old powerhouse still stands today on the shores of Lake Natoma as a reminder of the vision of the Livermore family.

Although legislation for the establishment of a branch state prison at Folsom was first passed by the legislature in 1858, construction did not begin until 1874 when additional acreage for the prison was secured. Further legislation was required to obtain the necessary funding, and the first cell block was finally completed in 1880. The oldest sections of the prison and walls are constructed of native granite quarried on the site. At one time the prison had its own rail line, power plant, and ice manufacturing facility, and livestock production supplied foodstuffs to prisons throughout the state. Folsom Prison has grown over the years, provided good paying jobs to local residents, and helped maintain the local economy when farming or mining activities were depressed.

Gold mining made a comeback in Folsom after dredgers were introduced in 1899. At first small companies, like Folsom Development Company, worked the area around Rebel Hill and established shops and housing along Folsom Boulevard in an area called Dredge. Because of its huge investment in grapes and other agricultural products, the Natoma Company did not begin to convert its land holdings until around 1908. The Folsom gold field ran from Blue Ravine about 6 miles above Folsom to about 9 miles downstream of the Historic District. In places it was 3 miles wide and 75 feet deep. With the reentry of the Natoma Company, gold dredging remained a substantial business, except for the war years and the Depression, until the 1960s. Remnants of such dredging activity are quickly being lost as the rock piles in Folsom are being leveled for future development, but large piles are still visible along Folsom Boulevard as you enter the Historic District.

Sutter Street was the heart of the Folsom business district from the 1850s until the 1950s, when businesses moved uptown to East Bidwell Street. Most of the oldest surviving buildings date from the 1890s and are constructed of brick and stone. Among the earliest merchants were members of the Cohn, Levy, and Burnham families, whose homes still stand on nearby Figueroa and Scott Streets. Simon Cohn was a grocer. His son-in-law, Philip Cohn, succeeded him in the business and later became a California State Senator. The Levys ran a tobacco shop and were instrumental in the establishment and later operation of the Folsom Library, which was located on Sutter Street. James Burnham operated one of the earliest drugstores in the city; through a succession of owners, it is still operating as the Model Pharmacy on East Bidwell Street.

The Cohn grocery business was purchased by Matt Rumsey in 1913 and was later operated by his son, Bill, who went on to run a hardware store in the same location. The Kipp and Higgins grocery store began on Sutter Street in 1909. It was operated by Gene Kipp and members of the family including son Jack, who would later open an appliance business on East Bidwell. Jack Kipp recently retired from the City Council after serving as mayor and councilman for over 29 years. The new City Hall is named in his honor. Manuel Relvas arrived in Folsom in 1863 and worked in the mining industry. His grandson, Abe, opened the Sutter Club in 1936 and it is still in operation today. Another grandson, Al, owned the Model Pharmacy from 1938 until 1958 after he moved it to East Bidwell Street.

The Folsom Telegraph began as the Granite Journal in 1856, making it the fourth oldest weekly newspaper in California. The first publisher was Dr. L. Bradley, who set up shop in the basement of a building located at Sutter and Wool Streets. The newspaper became the Folsom Telegraph in 1860. Members of the McFarland family published the paper from 1896 to 1942. During most of its life and through various owners, the newspaper was published from offices located in the Historic District and is currently located at Natoma and Oakdale.

The initial work for the current Folsom Dam, which is located about a mile upstream from the Historic District, began after World War II and brought many workers and new families to Folsom. The first cement was poured in 1952 and the dam was dedicated four years later. This dam has provided the first adequate flood control to Folsom and downstream communities from the floodwaters of the American River. It has also provided hydroelectric power and more water for homes, industry, and agriculture in the region.

The incorporation of the city in 1946 began the expansion of Folsom's boundaries from the original 98 blocks to a town that extends from the El Dorado County line on the east, to Highway 50 on the south, to Alder Creek on the west, to large tracts north of the American River bordering Orangevale and Placer County. It is no longer an isolated little community at the eastern edge of Sacramento County, but is rather a vibrant, growing city with new residents and industries such as Intel, which stepped into the shoes of the Natoma Company, which recently sold its last real estate holdings in Folsom and closed its doors after 140 years in the community.