

Folsom, California
by
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(Copied from Folsom Family Association of America, Inc., 1985 Annual Report)

Folsom, California and Foulsham, England are half the globe apart, but they have a number of things in common other than the pronunciation of their names. Each is a small town filled with friendly people, and each has a past history which goes beyond the first written record of their area.

For Foulsham, England, to have been mentioned in the Domesday Survey (the enumeration of men and land ordered by King William and made in 1086-1088) it had to have been in existence for a goodly number of years before that time. But no one is certain as to why the settlement there was so named.

However, there is no speculation as to why Folsom, California received its name, for it was named for Captain Joseph Libby Folsom who laid out the town in 1855 and named it "Granite City." When he died in 1855, the town's residents changed the name to "Folsom" to honor him. While Folsom, California had to wait only three years to appear in a United States Census (its inhabitants are enumerated in the Census of 1860) there is tradition that there was an Indian settlement at this site many years earlier.

Captain Joseph Folsom, son of Abraham⁶ Folsom and Mary Libby Folsom was born in New Hampshire. At the 1985 Folsom Family Association meeting Bruce Folsom detailed how he came to be in California at the time of the famous "Gold Rush."

Captain Folsom chose the site for the town about 1854, and spent part of 1855 laying out the streets and naming them. By January, 1856, all the town lots had been sold and three hotels had been constructed before February, 1856 when twenty-two miles of the Sacramento Valley Railroad were completed. Six or seven more hotels were built before 1860.

To serve the miners in the nearby gold field, a Wells Fargo office was constructed at the western terminal of the Pony Express. The walls of the building were masonry of unusual thickness, and the doors were of heavy iron. Each window had shutters barred with iron. Such construction was for the protection against fire as much as against robbers. The miners brought their gold here to have it weighed, and here they were paid for their "strikes." Today this building is a museum of memorabilia of the gold rush days. The original building was torn down in the 1920's, but rebuilt some ten years ago.

None of the original business buildings are left as fires destroyed that area in 1866, again in 1871 and 1872, and of those which were rebuilt at that time, only one or two escaped the fire of 1886. The best known of these was made of pressed tin, and is in use today. The building next door to this,

was begun about 1900 for the first home of the town's weekly newspaper. It was later taken over for the post office, and when a new building was completed by the United States government to house the post office, the 1900 era building was converted to professional offices which are still there.

The basement of a building a few doors further on was originally a brewery. The main floor portion was the site of the Cohn General Store for many years.

Some time later, a third story was added, and this three-story building contains the only elevator in Folsom.

The present hotel was built in 1885 as the "western Hotel," the "home of the working man and the stranger." All of the church buildings in Folsom have been constructed since the 1886 fire, most in this century.

Captain Folsom had named the main business street "Sutter Street" in honor of the farmer on whose land the first gold nuggets were found. Names chosen for other Folsom streets by him include Leidesdorff Street for William Alexander Leidesdorff, a San Francisco businessman and owner of the original Mexican land grant in which Folsom is located; Persifer Street, named for General Persifer Jones of the United States Army who led the American troops to secure California for the United States; Scott Street, named for General Winfield Scott who commanded the American forces in the War with Mexico; Figuero Street, for one of the early Spanish governors of California, Bidwell Street, named for John Bidwell who led the first party of American settlers across the plains to California. Captain Folsom honored his sister by naming one street Sibley Street, and his nephew by naming another Decatur street. The Mormon miners who were the first to work the nearby river mines to the east of Folsom were commemorated with the street bearing the name "Mormon."

Figueroa and Scott streets were favorite locations of early settlers for their homes. One of the first to build there was the town doctor, Lerman Bates. The lumber, siding, and trim for the house were shipped from New England around Cape Horn. This house is still standing. Another early house which is still occupied is the Philip Cohn house, begun on Scott street about 1860. Mr. Cohn was the proprietor of the General Store on Sutter Street. He was later elected a state senator. In 1890, he had a square cupola added above the second story.

The Hyman house on Figuero Street, built in the 1880's shows the influence of the Victorian style of architecture, while the Burham house next door is of the Queen Anne period. Much of the interior of this house was ruined by a fire in 1975, but the owners have been able to duplicate many of the early features.

In 1879, an adopted Californian by the name of Horatio Livermore envisioned the damming of the American River near where it runs through Folsom to provide water for the growing community. To secure cheap labor for his project, he donated some of the land he owned in the area to the State of California so that a prison could be built, and he could "hire" the prisoners to build the dam. The prison was completed in 1880; and the dam

completed in 1893 provided not only water but electricity for the growing town of Folsom. The powerhouse here, was the terminus of the first long distance transmission of electricity in the world — 22 miles — to Sacramento.

General Electric Company "gambled" that such long distance transmission would be a success by providing \$20,000 worth of machinery and powerhouse equipment. It would be interesting to learn the percentage of their return on this investment.

In this century, the dam was reconstructed and enlarged. The water storage capacity was greatly increased, and Folsom Lake, with 75 miles of shoreline, was created.

Folsom has survived where many of the other early towns in this area of California have become only names in history. The recreational areas of Folsom Lake and the historical attractions of the city make it possible for the continued growth of the town and a memorial to the man who founded it.

The Folsom Telegraph

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The history museum in Folsom is a logical stop for these visitors from across the country all descendants of John and Mary Folsom, who emigrated to New England from England in 1638.