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Stories of Folsom Lake, Its Dam and the Electrification of Sacramento

By Brittneydawn Cook

Partially completed Folsom Dam on American River. Image shows the granite slabs of wall stretching the width of the river along with the hoisting machinery necessary to get the granite slabs up to the working inmates. Courtesy of the California State Library Folsom Prison collection.
It Starts With A Memory

As a kid, there was rarely a summer that went by without a trip to Folsom Lake, which is located in the Sierra Nevada foothills twenty-five miles northeast of Sacramento. My father had a special place he preferred that was right along the edge of the walls of the current Folsom Dam. There was a little beach area that we hiked down to and many summer nights were spent swimming, fishing and hearing stories of how things used to be. My family has lived in the Sacramento area for generations, and they have seen neighboring towns start from nothing and grow into suburban communities. My grandma always tells us how she saw the Folsom Dam being built, and how the family would come out in the evenings to watch the construction from the hillsides.

On one of our many trips to the Folsom area, I can remember seeing the ruins of a wall along the banks of the American River in the distance and asking my father what they were. We inspected from afar together and he surmised it looked like an old dam. This memory comes flooding back with the conclusion of every summer. With summer at an end once again and with Folsom Lake memories fresh on my mind, I was inspired to finally put to rest the question of what those ruins in the distance were so I turned to the stacks at the California State Library for answers.

An Industrial City

The idea for the original Folsom Dam stemmed from one man’s dream of an East Coast industrial city nestled in the foothills of California. Horatio Gates Livermore came to California from Maine in 1850 to make his fortune in the famed Gold Rush. H. G. Livermore grew up in the thick forests of Livermore, Maine, which is named after his family. It is said that H. G. traveled via covered wagon convoy out of St. Joseph Missouri and along the way was attacked by Britannydawn Cook is a Sacramento native who became the Executive Director of the California State Library Foundation in December 2018. To read more about her please see page 20.
hostile Indians, which delayed the caravan in Salt Lake City until late spring of 1850.

While looking for his big break during the Gold Rush, H. G. Livermore explored the banks of the American River and settled in Georgetown, a small town in El Dorado County, California. While panning for gold, Livermore found himself entranced by the power of the river, and it was in one of these entrancements that he started to think back to his home state of Maine. He thought back to the logging industries and the use of logging mills in waterways. He realized that in his travels he had heard talk that California had a scarcity of lumber mills in the Sacramento area, and the few that existed were charging top dollar. He began to create elaborate plans for the future in regard to supplying Sacramento with the lumber needed to expand the city.

Livermore was so excited about this idea of an industrial city powered by water that he began talking to everyone he knew, but alas, it would take him years to get the process of building the Folsom Dam started. At the time, water was a commodity in high demand due to its use in gold mining processes. Like Livermore, many people were looking at the American River and seeing dollar bills reflected back at them. One of these people was A. P. Catlin, a Mormon Island resident and future superior court judge of Sacramento County. Catlin formed the Natoma Water & Mining Company in 1851 (a year before taking a seat in the California State Senate) with five other local men: Judge Thomas Williams, G. Craig, William Jarvis, Henry Robinson, and John Bennett.

Under the control of Catlin, the Natoma Water & Mining Company immediately started construction of the sixteen mile Natoma ditch to divert water from the American River to the various nearby mining cities. By November, the ditch was completed and water was up for sale. In *A Study of the Old Folsom Dam and Power-Plant* by Louis Edward Jones, it is stated that the Natoma ditch measured 8 ft. wide at the top, 5 ft. wide at the bottom, and 3 ft. deep, and in its run of one mile, it had five wooden flumes, two of which measured 2,000 ft. in length. “One twisted and curved around the steep side of the hill between Higgins Point and New York Creek, the other crossed a high wooden bridge over New York Creek.” The author continues by describing the layout of the canal: “the ditch took its water from
the South Fork of the American River, about two miles above Salmon Falls, where a dam had been built to form a small pond.” Construction of the dam cost $200,000 and the Natoma Water & Mining Company managed to net a profit of $40,000 in the first year. During the summer of 1853, the Natoma Water & Mining Company became a joint-stock venture and elected the following officials: A. P. Catlin, president; S. R. Caldwell, vice president; A. T. Arrowsmith, secretary; T. S. Craig, treasurer; G. N. Colby, H. Hollester, F. S. Mumford, T. H. Berry, F. Clark, and E. O. Crews, directors. As the company was opened up to stockholders, Livermore jumped at his chance to own part of the company and purchased as much stock as he could afford. Before 1853 was over Livermore was joined in California by his two sons, Horatio Putnam (H. P) and Charles (Chas.) Edward, who would help bring to life their father’s plans. In the next year, Livermore would find himself seated in the California State Senate, in which he served only one term.

**Company Expansion**

In 1854, A. P. Catlin and the majority holders of the company decided to expand into a second company, The American River Water & Mining Company, to start diverting water from the North Fork of the American River. The Natoma ditch was extended by twelve miles in 1856 to nearby Prairie City, costing the company $300,000. Even with the high cost of the expansion the company prospered which allowed them to purchase more than 8,500 acres in the current Folsom area. This land purchase included most of the Leidesdorff land grant. The company decided to divide the property and allow for some of it to be used for industrial businesses and agriculture. When no offers were made to lease the land, the company decided to plant 2,000 acres of vineyards and fruit trees in order to make some profit from their acquisition.

By 1862, the Livermores took control of the Natoma Water and Mining Company, and the town of Folsom was chosen for the future site of the lumber mill H.G. Livermore had dreamed of. Folsom was a perfect place due to its location on the American River and the convenience of having a direct train line to the city of Sacramento. After sixteen long years, Livermore was finally able to make his first attempt at a log drive at Folsom. The...
first attempt was made before the sawmill was built, and it was a failure. The current of the American River was too quick and powerful for the logs to be plucked from it before they were carried downstream. With the company now starting to lose money, new approaches needed to be considered. The company looked to its engineer, H. T. Knight, for an answer to its problems. It was concluded that the best answer for the success of this logging industry was to build a dam.

**Slow Process for a Big Future**

The company started the process for the future dam by investing $119,000 in a two-mile extension of railroad tracks from Folsom station to the site of the dam for the transport of materials. The beginning of the foundation of the new dam took place in the fall of 1864, but the winter rains made water levels too high for construction to continue. While the foundation survived the winter, the construction was halted for a long time while the company worked on obtaining the permits to continue with its grand plans. By this time, electricity was becoming a worldwide phenomenon, and Horatio P. Livermore was fascinated. H. P. was keeping up with the electrical work being done overseas and it became obvious
to him that the Folsom Dam project could easily support a hydroelectric plant. He started to work out a plan for a powerhouse, discussing with electrical manufacturers what he needed only to be told that what he was trying to accomplish “had no precedent” and therefore was deemed impossible. The Livermores still did not back down from their dreams, and they started to look elsewhere for support in this industrial venture. In 1868, the stars aligned in favor of the Livermores in the form of a ten year old legislation decision.

In 1858, the California Legislature authorized the Board of Prison directors to select a site for a new state prison. No movement had been made by the Board of Prison directors by 1868, so the legislature gave the board a deadline date of June 30, 1868, and limited the board to two locations: Folsom and Rocklin. The Livermores heard of the deadline and scheduled an appointment with the board of directors. During the meeting, the Natoma Water & Mining Co., arguing for the Folsom location, offered the board of directors 350 acres along with exclusive rights to water and future electricity that would come from the powerplant attached to the prison. The catch was that the state would pay $15,000 for convict labor to help construct the dam, canal, and powerhouse. The board agreed on Folsom and took their proposal to the legislature, and thus began an extended waiting period.

On March 30, 1874, the legislative bill passed, allowing the company to finally break ground in Folsom on the first of October. As state surveyors came to view the property, they realized that it was not really the desired location. Another deal was made for the neighboring 133 acres in return for an additional $15,000 in convict labor. The company agreed, and bids for construction were advertised, and the search turned up a Mr. Miles. Miles and the state agreed on very little, which lead to Mr. Miles walking out on his contract shortly after the project was started. According to Louis Edward Jones
in his studies of the old Folsom Dam, Mr. Miles was just the first to leave. “Before it was over, the entire prison staff and everyone connected with it had either been fired or quit,” Jones said. Due to all the delays, the Folsom prison wouldn’t be finished until July of 1880, and in 1881, stockholders of the Natoma Water & Mining Company formed the Folsom Water and Power Company turning over all its rights and properties related to water power.

When the new company formed, Charles E. Livermore was made its president and Horatio P. Livermore became general manager. Another familiar name came along with them as chief engineer, and that was H. T. Knight. There is no record of H. G. Livermore in this new company, but his sons carried on with his original plans. The first order of business for the company was to approach the state about a follow-up on the promised workforce in return for the land the state had been using for free. At a meeting with prison officials the company made a demand for their overdue workforce. The demand was met and the project was resumed immediately. The success of the demand was short-lived because by 1882 things came to a crashing halt. “The Company felt the 80 prisoners furnished them could not possibly build the dam as fast as they wished. Nor was the original $15,000 worth of labor, agreed on in the contract, enough to see its completion.” The state did not agree, and the disagreement went to court, ending in favor of the company.

A Second Chance
By this time, a new governor, Robert Water-
Image of inmates and hoisting machinery at work constructing the Folsom Dam. Image reads “Dam at Folsom Prison.” Courtesy of the California State Library Folsom Prison collection.

Depiction of the elevation of the Folsom Dam found in A Study of the Old Folsom Dam and Power-Plant.
Image showing ruins of original Folsom Dam in foreground while the new dam stands tall in the background.
Image from A Study of the Old Folsom Dam and Power-Plant
On September 9, 1895, electricity was successfully transmitted to Sacramento, a distance of twenty two miles.

man, had been elected, and the company was fast to reapproach the dam project in regard to prison labor. On May 8, 1888, in the meeting with the State Prison Board the following offers were made:
1) The company would give additional water power that would be produced by a bigger fall in the dam project in return for the labor of the canal and dam.
2) The state would obtain use of the two-mile railroad the company had built as long as the state agreed to keep up the repairs.
3) The prison would be allowed to pump from the future canal for all domestic and irrigation purposes.
4) The prison would have access and use of the gravel from the river bed.
5) The company would give permission to the prison to run its sewer line over company property and allow its waste to flow into the river.

The offers were accepted, and work on the project resumed on July 1, 1888.

The spring of 1889 would return focus to the original mission of lumbering, and Charles Livermore formed the American River Land & Lumber Company with A. J. Ralston. The general manager position was awarded to H. P. Livermore, and the company was quick to purchase a 10,000-acre parcel of timberland in Slab Creek, forty four miles above Folsom along the South Fork of the American River. By 1890, the first log run was attempted with a half-built dam. The log run, which consisted of 700,000 board feet of logs, was successful. Finally, in 1892 the logging dream of H. G. Livermore was coming to fruition, but he wouldn’t make it to the finish line, passing away in Oakland just a few months before the completion of the dam in 1893. The dam stood 89 feet above the river bed and was 650 feet wide. According to Jones, The dam required “30,000 cubic yards of masonry, of which the headworks (the diversion point of a waterway) alone occupied 15,000 cubic yards.” Built completely of granite quarried on the spot, the dam was capable of backing up the river four miles with an estimated 13 million cubic yards of water storage in its reservoir.

Electric City
After their father’s death, the Livermore brothers, along with Albert Gallatin, decided to move forward with an earlier discussed possibility, namely electricity. Thus the Sacramento Electric Power and Light Company was formed and the idea of powering the whole city of Sacramento became the full focus of the Livermore brothers. In September of 1893, the company signed a contract with General Electric to begin construction on the highly anticipated hydroelectric plant. The foundation for the Folsom Powerhouse was started by October 10, 1894, and completed by July of 1895. The initial report quoted by Jones states that “An 11,000 volt 3-phase transmission line was carried on cedar poles from the powerhouse to Sacramento.” The 4,000 horsepower electrical generation that the powerhouse could produce seems small in comparison to today’s electrical generators, but at the time, it put Folsom on the map.

On September 9, 1895, electricity was successfully transmitted to Sacramento, a distance of twenty two miles. At an earlier suggestion from The Sacramento Bee, the community had organized a local celebration on the day to honor the addition of electricity to Sacramento. They planned the electrical celebration
The Citizens of Sacramento, California, cordially invite you to join them in the Grand Electrical Carnival, commemorative of the successful installation by The Sacramento Electric Power and Light Company of the greatest operative electrical plant on the American Continent. Monday, September 9th, 1895.

R.D. Stephens, J.B. Wright, B.W. Robinson, Mayor, Invitation Committee.

Power station at Sacramento, 135 miles from source of power.
around the 1895 State Fair and Admissions Day. The Sacramento Bee announced the following: “This is the birth for us of Power, of Growth, of Greatness. It is right that we should rejoice and celebrate it in this Grand Electric Carnival, September 9, 1895.”

Engineers traveled from far and wide to come see the long distance transmission. The Journal of Electricity noted that Sacramento became the first American city to demonstrate the transmission of high-voltage electricity over such a long distance. It should also be noted that the Folsom State Prison became the first throughout the world to have electricity. No less than 30,000 people attended the Grand Electrical Carnival, which far surpassed the original estimate of visitors. Housing became a problem and a committee of Native Sons of the Golden West figured out a solution. They compiled a list of rooms available in private residences and hotels “charging one dollar per person or two dollars for a double bed.” Visitors were so enamored by the electricity, they paid to stay.

A New Age, and Final Chapter
When all was said and done, the Livermore brothers could relish the fact that they brought to life an unknown dream of their father’s. What started as dreams of an industrial logging town turned into an electric city fueled by a river that one pioneer saw so much potential in. However, the Livermore family could never get too far from their electrical success. Norman Livermore, grandson of H. G. and son of H. P., would renew the family interest when he inherited his father’s remaining stock in both the Folsom Water Power Company and the Sacramento Light and Power Company in 1916 at the passing of his father. These were later included in the merger of the Pacific Gas and Electric Company holdings. Over his lifetime Norman would find himself in many amazing positions: A Cornell graduate; a civilian assistant for the Army Corps of Engineers; Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Army during WWI; president of a drug firm; founding member of PG&E; director, trustee, or member of various well-known companies and corporations; and groundbreaking for the current Folsom Dam. At the age of seventy seven, Norman B. Livermore was invited by PG&E as an honored guest and speaker at the 1949 groundbreaking ceremony of the $50 million U.S. Army Corps of Engineers flood control and water conservation project that we know as the Folsom Lake & Dam. With that my curiosity of that mysterious broken wall can now be put to rest.

“This is the birth for us of Power, of Growth, of Greatness. It is right that we should rejoice and celebrate it in this Grand Electric Carnival, September 9, 1895.”

SOURCES


Chickering, Allen L. In Memoriam. California Historical Society Quarterly, Vol. 33 No. 1, Mar., 1954; (pp. 81-82)


The beautiful Howard & Davis Gold Scales now rest on an antique table. The table recalls the time when the scales were in the State Library’s facility in the State Capitol Building. Photograph by Brittneydawn Cook.

EDITOR’S NOTE

Gary F. Kurutz is the editor of the California State Library Foundation Bulletin and former curator of special collections at the California State Library.
The Weight of Justice

The Story behind the Gold Scales in the J. S. Holliday Rare Materials Reading Room of the State Library

By Gary F. Kurutz

When I started working at the California State Library in 1980, and had occasion to visit the State Librarian’s office in the Library and Courts Building, a large brass gold balance or scales caught my eye, not only because of its beauty, but also because of its significance. During the heyday of the Gold Rush, scales such as this one manufactured by the Howard & Davis Company of Boston, Massachusetts, were regularly used to weigh gold dust and nuggets. When the California History Section moved into its new facility at 900 N Street, Sacramento in 1994, the scales were carefully moved into the J. S. Holliday Rare Materials Reading Room. This large antique from the early 1850s is housed in a vintage glass case. On the scales’ marble base is a typewritten card describing its intriguing history which compelled me to dig further into its past.

According to the information on this card, the gold scales were once owned by a Mrs. William (Jennie) Ritter of Michigan Bar, a prosperous mining town on the Cosumnes River in eastern Sacramento County. Jennie Ritter’s husband was one of the wealthiest men in Sacramento County. Unfortunately, the story associated with the Ritter family and the gold scales is not a happy one. On the evening of July 2, 1865, William Ritter was visiting with friends in nearby Willows Springs in Amador County. At the time, Jennie Ritter and her son were visiting relatives in Philadelphia. Mr. Ritter’s group included John O’Brien, his wife, their young son, and a woman only identified as Miss Fulton. They boarded Ritter’s carriage to return home to Sebastopol in neighboring Sacramento County but they stopped at the store of John L. Atkinson near Michigan Bar around nine o’clock in the evening. It is uncertain why they decided to make this stop. As Ritter and friends pulled up to the store, they had no idea that two armed masked men were inside ransacking the place and holding Atkinson, his son George and a man named Larry prisoner. Shortly beforehand, one of the robbers had covered

up the store windows and door to hide their pillaging. The following is the account of what happened to Ritter and his friends according to the July 4, 1865, issue of the Sacramento Daily Union:

At this moment the carriage drove up, and one of the three men in the rear of the store exclaimed, “There’s Ritter.” One of the robbers quickly exclaimed, “Bring him in.” But both [outlaws] then moved to the door, and rushing out, each seized a horse by the head and demanded of Ritter his money. Ritter commenced to whip up his horses and strike violently with his whip at the robbers, and they both commenced shooting at him in return. The ladies begged Ritter, as the shooting commenced, to yield to the demand made upon him. As soon as young Atkins [Atkinson] could regain his self-possession he ran for a shotgun, with which he came out and fired at one of the robbers. Although it is supposed that the shot did not take effect, both robbers at once let go of the horses and made their escape. During this time O’Brien occupied the front seat of the carriage with Ritter and the ladies, and the boy in the behind seat. Neither of the men had weapons of any character with them. The horses had moved about twenty feet from the starting point in their struggles to free themselves from the men. Ritter realized that he was wounded, but made no examination as to the character of the injury and started forward for the purpose of reaching home.6

Valiantly, Ritter grasped the reins of the horses and tried to move on but soon fainted. O’Brien seized the reins and drove the carriage to the ranch home of a Mrs. Marcy. A coroner’s account states that Dr. G. L. Simmons and a Dr. F. W. Hatch came to examine him but the doctors found that the gunshot had entered his abdomen and the bullet lodged near his spine. Little could be done and Ritter died the next day.7

Because of his prominence and the horrific nature of the crime, the State of California

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**THE HOWARD & DAVIS GOLD SCALES**

The gold scales adorning the J. S. Holliday Rare Materials Reading Room were manufactured by the famous Boston firm of Howard & Davis. They were best known as makers of banjo-shaped clocks and fine watches. The partnership existed from 1842 to 1857. The successor company, E. Howard & Company issued a catalog in 1858, with the following description of “Gold Standard Balances [scales]:”

All the Boston Banks have our Balances in daily use, and they are acknowledged as the standards throughout California. The regular sizes are of the respective capacities of 1,500, 3,000, and 5,000 pennyweights. They are made of the very best materials and the highest grade of workmanship; all the bearings jeweled, and nothing omitted to secure perfect accuracy in weighing, with beauty of finish; each is mounted on a marble slab, and enclosed in a glass case, with balanced slide front.

The Howard & Davis scales were treasured for its accuracy and fine construction. According to one source, “Miners claimed they were so accurate they could weigh a pencil mark.” Early California banks, including Wells Fargo and Company and the U.S. Mint in San Francisco regarded bullion scales as essential equipment.

The weights or counter weights used to balance against the gold nuggets and dust are generally stored in a fitted box. However, the weights within the Library’s case are incomplete, lacking the larger sizes. Within the glass case are two scoops or tools probably used to load the gold onto the scales (pans). The scales in the Library are of the largest size measuring thirty-two inches high by thirty-six inches wide. Within a cartouche on the beam of the instrument is an engraving with the following description: “Gold Standard Balance | Howard & Davis | Manufacturers, Boston, Mass, U.S.A. | Full Jeweled.”

The Howard & Davis device is considered to be the “crown jewel” of a Gold Rush collection. Present day owners of these scales often polish the brass giving it the illusion of shining gold as it rests in a protective glass case. The scales in the Library, however, have moderate oxidation and tarnishing. The Wells Fargo and Company museums on nearby Capitol Mall and in Old Town Sacramento also display highly polished Howard & Davis gold scales.

The California History Section also houses pocket gold scales that, more than likely, were used by individual miners as a way to pay for food, drink, and supplies in currency-poor gold camps.

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**EDITOR’S NOTE**

The author wishes to extend his gratitude to Tom Martin, a true expert on California Gold Rush antiques, for supplying critical information on Howard & Davis gold scales. In addition, Mr. Martin “rebalanced” the gold scales, and provided valuable information concerning how the scales actually worked.
Gold Rush expert Tom Martin (left) and Gary Kurutz pose with this antique treasure in the J. S. Holliday Rare Materials Reading Room. Martin rebalanced the scales and gave a riveting demonstration on how bankers and merchants weighed the miner’s gold dust and nuggets.

Close up of the gold scales in their protective case. The scales are resting on the original marble base. A beam holds the pendants. The pendants are marked R. and L. to represent right and left, with the letters facing the operator.

Photographs by Brittneydawn Cook.
and the Ritter family each offered a reward of $1,000 for the capture of the masked outlaws. To make the situation even worse, the Union reported that John Atkinson was stabbed to death at his store and home in August 1865, only a few months after the murder of Ritter. His son George Atkinson firmly believed that the same outlaw who shot Ritter had also killed his father. Apparently the senior Atkinson did get a good look at the outlaws while in their store despite their masks and stated he would be able to identify the perpetrators. George speculated that his father was killed because the outlaws feared he would become a witness against them.8

However, this nefarious duo, hiding out in the back country of Sacramento, Amador, and Placer Counties, outwitted all efforts to apprehend them until June 2, 1868, when Marysville sheriff officers went after a supposed horse thief. They located the suspect on B and First Streets in the city’s downtown and exchanged gunfire and the outlaw fell dead. According to newspaper coverage, the deceased was identified as the notorious outlaw “Mountain Scott.” Maryville officers identified him as either Charles Williams or Bill Scott. An article in the Marysville Daily Appeal stated: “It was afterwards ascertained that the deceased was the notorious ‘Mountain Scott,’ the highwayman who murdered Mr. Ritter at Michigan Bar several years ago.”9 A coroner’s jury and Deputy Sheriff of Yuba County M. R. Casad, further identified the corpse as that of Mountain Scott and connected him to the death of Ritter. Three years later justice had finally been meted out. However, no one found his partner in crime.10

Before this tragic event, Ritter had achieved a great deal of success and recognition in the gold mines and boasted that no one could rob him. Ironically, his elevated status caused him to be recognized by Atkinson, who unwittingly alerted the masked brigands. Ritter was one of the discoverers of the Manzanita Mine near Nevada City and used the profits to acquire mining interests near Michigan Bar as early as 1855. He

Detail of the scales showing the ivory handle lever “whereby the beam, scales (pans,) and weights are raised for any operation in weighing, and let down as soon as the operation is completed.” Benjamin Dearborn, Balance Factory, Boston, November 1817. Photograph by Brittneydawn Cook.
specialized in constructing mining ditches and established the Ritter Ditch Company. Winfield J. Davis, in An Illustrated History of Sacramento County, California, wrote: “In 1857 Mr. Ritter laid the solid foundation of a dam and ‘sea-wall’ on the South Fork of the Cosumnes and thus began the construction of the Prairie Ditch, extending about twenty-one miles to Michigan Bar, completed about 1858.”

No doubt a man of such riches needed gold scales as a means of determining the value of the ore that his company harvested from its ditches. The beautiful Howard & Davis scales owned by Ritter were considered the finest and most accurate of gold weighing instruments. Following his violent death, Jennie Ritter inherited much of her husband’s belongings, which would have included the gold scales. She, in turn, must have sold the Ritter Ditch Company to the Cosumnes Irrigation Company. As recorded on the card within the exhibit case, Robertson Topp McKisick (1871–1925), the donor of the scales, purchased them from the irrigation company when he served as its attorney. According to a separate donor card dated 1925, Mr. & Mrs. Robertson McKisick gave the scales to the Library. The card further stated: “Information given by C. B. Ruman, Michigan Bar, the man who brought the scales into Mr. McKisick’s office.” Ruman also noted: “The scales were considered very expensive and valuable even in the early days.”

McKisick himself led a fascinating life. The California History Section holds an undated biographical form filled out by him probably when he served as the deputy attorney general for the State of California and had his office in the State Capitol Building. Prior to his appointment as deputy attorney general, McKisick held the position of city attorney for the City of Sacramento. In filling out this form, he made special note of his favorite hobby: “Have practiced rifle-shooting as a pastime for over 30 years. Was coach and instructor at U. C. [University of California] from 1890–92, am expert rifleman and deem my services would be more valuable in present crisis as instructor in rifle-shooting and care of rifles than in any other capacity — am president [of] State Rifle Association.” The “crisis,” may have been World War I. It is ironic that shooting rifles was his hobby as it was a rifle shot that killed Ritter. Unfortunately, the State Library does not have a statement from McKisick stating what prompted him and his wife to make this generous donation. At the time, the Library was also in the State Capitol Building and had on display many mining artifacts, and perhaps they may have thought of these spectacular gold scales as a good fit. Nonetheless, the Ritter scales serve as a fascinating artifact and as a grim reminder of the dangerous conditions that permeated the mining camps of that era.

ENDNOTES

1. The author wishes to thank Sharon Stewart of the State Library’s California History Section and archivists Kim Hayden and Sean Heylinger of the Center for Sacramento History for their generous assistance. In addition to the card in the display case, the State Library has a donor card dated 1925.

2. Mildred Brooke Hoover and Hero Eugene and Ethel Grace Rensch, in their Historic Spots in California, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966, p. 301, wrote: “Michigan Bar was the most prominent of all the early gold camps on the Cosumnes River in Sacramento County. Founded in 1849 by two men from Michigan, it reached a population of 1,500 or more in the early 1850s. The original townsite has since been washed out by hydraulic mining.”


4. According to Erwin G. Guade, California Gold Camps, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975, p. 313, Sebastopol in Sacramento County was then located on the old Ione Valley Road.

5. In researching this article, I found conflicting facts in the newspaper. One issue called it the store of Atkins & Son and another, stated a store owned by John L. Atkinson. A search of other sources did not confirm either name. Sacramento County (Cala.) Coroner’s Office Records, Center for Sacramento History.


7. Ibid and “Inquest of Body of Wm. Ritter,” Sacramento County (Cala.) Coroner’s Office Records, Center for Sacramento History.

8. Sacramento Daily Union, August 17, p. 3, c. 1 and August 18, 1865, p. 3, c. 1.

9. “A Desperado Killed,” Sacramento Daily Union, June 3, 1868, p. 3, c. 1. Another account appeared in the Marysville Daily Appeal, June 3, 1868, p. 3, c. 1. The Marysville newspaper on June 10, 1868, p. 3, c. 1, reported that the local sheriff identified Ritter’s murderer as Bill Scott, a mulatto, who went by the nickname “Mountain Scott.” Peter J. Delay in his History of Yuba and Sutter Counties, California, Los Angeles: Historic Record Company, 1924, pp. 108–109, wrote: “It was later ascertained that the deceased was a noted criminal, wanted for several offenses; that he was a native of Jamaica, aged thirty years; and that his correct name was Charles Williams.”


11. Davis, An Illustrated History of Sacramento County, California, p. 585.
Sometimes people get their dream jobs. Brittneydawn Cook finally found hers at the California State Library Foundation when she took over the executive director position earlier this year. Gary Kurutz retired as the lead administrator, but will continue with the editorial oversight of the Bulletin.

Cook may be a familiar face to many in the State Library Foundation community. Most recently she was the administrative assistant for the organization, in addition to various preservation projects relating to the State Library and other work on historic photographs.

In addition to her knack for organization and administration, her knowledge of film photography and unique photography processes will be an asset for the State Library. Working with film negatives in general is a craft suffering from fewer and fewer users, but Cook has additional experience with rare and antique processes that could come in handy with the State Library’s extensive collection.

That she has such a deep knowledge of traditional methods is an anomaly in the world of photography these days, especially for a millennial. Most experts in the area are at an age to retire, or beyond. Cook just turned 30.

When older film photographers meet Cook, they are constantly surprised by her knowledge of techniques of the pre-digital era. “They first say, ‘How old are you?’ and then ask, ‘Where did you learn that?’” She laughs.

Cook initially thought she wanted to be a commercial photographer. The world of photography was exploding, after all, and she’s quick with technology. After getting her bachelor’s degree from California State University Sacramento(CSUS) in photography and journalism, she thought she had landed her dream job working with a successful commercial photographer.

She quickly realized she was mistaken, and chuckled when she thinks of the misstep. “It wasn’t for me,” she said. “I kept thinking, what do I really want to do?”

She found herself daydreaming about the past, previous internships and part-time jobs, like her days at Cox Black and White Lab, a local photography services facility owned by State Library Foundation Board Member Katherine Weedman-Cox and her husband, Jeff. Past projects also entered Cook’s musings, remembering the hours working on images made by Jack London, images that are housed at the California State Parks facility in Sonoma.

The most common process for black-and-white photography now involves modern films made on stable flexible plastic support films. But London’s negatives were created using nitrate-base films, which can be extremely flammable and require refrigeration to keep them from igniting spontaneously. Cook worked with the team at Cox Black and White to create 1500 new negatives from the originals, which took a year and a half and had to be done in small batches.

The original negatives were processed by London and his companions on a boat, and the instability of the working environment meant there were interesting flaws in processing the film: namely fingerprints everywhere on the negatives, likely because London or someone he worked with held the negatives before the emulsion was dry.

“I could put my thumb on Jack London’s thumb print,” she said as she reminisced about her time working with the materials and expressed her awe of working on the preservation project.

Other projects include digitizing the Earl Payne collection for the State Library, an archive of color landscapes of California that has been made available to the people of California for their viewing and personal use. Cook also worked to create a memorial website of some of Payne’s photography, earlpayne.org.

“His work isn’t well known, but it’s beautiful,” she said of the Sacramento native who started shooting during his service in WWII. Payne spent most of his professional career as a school photographer, and invested time and effort in high-quality, Ansel Adams inspired landscapes, but in vibrant color rather than Adams’ classic black and white.

Archival photography, making sure that images last for a long time, is very important to Cook. It is especially important when it comes to pictures of people, and often family. When she was working for the photo lab she often assisted with the restoration of older photos or negatives that were brought in by people looking to have images of their long-lost family members. She found inspiration when working with the damaged photos of loved ones from the past, and was heartened by the appreciation of current family members who were able to connect to their deceased loved ones.

“The gratitude that exists when you can return part of their family for them,” she said. “It’s probably the same feeling that genealogists must feel when they help people track down past family members. It’s overwhelming.”

Brittneydawn realized that while she loved photography, it was the archival processes and preserving the past that should be her focus, not modern commercial photography. “This is what I want to do,” she realized.

So, Cook pivoted in her career path and moved away from modern digital and
focused on the archival side. That led to an additional degree, a master's degree in library science from Syracuse University in 2018, in addition to her bachelor's degrees in both photography and journalism from Sacramento State.

While getting the degree, she knew she wanted to become involved with the California State Library. Her fascination with the State Library started when she was introduced to the collection of images by Carleton E. Watkins, the nineteenth-century photographer whose images of Yosemite and other scenes of California captured the attention of lawmakers back East. At the same time, others recognized Watkins' mastery of the art of photography. CSUS professor Roger Vail brought Cook's class to view the various collections and items as a local field trip, and the experience stuck.

While her first goal was to join the ranks of civil servants as a State Library employee, she realized that her real dream job is the one she found at the Foundation. "I want to help the Library," she says of her main career goal, "and I'm a better fit to help the Library from the Foundation."

High on her list of priorities is finding ways the Foundation can provide assistance to State Library employees and help them do their jobs better, as well as provide support for online platforms that can bring the historic collections to as many Californians as possible.

Cook hopes that her age will be an asset to the Foundation in bringing the State Library's collection and a love of learning and history to a younger generation. There are myriad ways to bring the historical resources to the masses through digital outreach and other communication means.

But she'd also like to increase direct support of the State Library, including with fun community events that have the dual purpose of both increasing awareness as well as increasing funds for the foundation to support the State Library. She will be reaching out to the staff and to the field of supporters and experts for ideas in this regard.

Outreach with the public comes naturally to Cook. "She's great with customer service, and always friendly," notes Gene Kennedy, a longtime Sacramento photographer and teacher who just joined the Foundation staff (see additional article in this issue about Gene Kennedy) and first met her while she was working at Cox Black and White Lab.

Photography, journalism and library science aren't Cook's only talents. She's also fluent in American Sign Language (Deaf Studies was Cook's third major at CSUS and came up one class short at the end of her senior year.) Her interest started when she was at Sierra College and needed to take a foreign language to fulfill transfer requirements. Cook had never thrived with foreign languages. "I'm a visual learner, a visual person," she said. Even Spanish would be a challenge, she felt. "I'm terrible at rolling my r's."

She found out that learning sign language would fulfill the requirement. So she signed up and fell in love with it. "Now I make all the facial expressions," she said, noting that signing includes not only hand movements but facial expressions as well.

The experience increased her already expressive communication style. "I have a terrible poker face," she laughs. "I automatically make these huge expressions. I can't help myself."

Mary Beth Barber is the special projects coordinator for the California State Library and a frequent contributor to the Bulletin.
Photography is everywhere in today's digital world, but finding expert craftsmen and women who have a deep knowledge of the world of chemical-based photography are a dying breed. Rarer still are those with deep knowledge of the historic techniques and equipment from the early days of photography, with large negatives and boxy cameras that appear simple and quaint from today's perspective, but which were wonderous at the time of their invention and first use.

One of those connections is Gene Kennedy, the latest employee to join the ranks of the California State Library Foundation, working with Executive Director Brittney-dawn Cook as administrative assistant. As administrative assistant, Kennedy will be helping in daily office work as well as lending a hand at events and exhibits.

Kennedy joins the Foundation after a long career as a photography expert not only in the making of art/documentary photos, but also in the technical craftsmanship of the paper and chemical processes of the medium. Much of Kennedy's time has been devoted to teaching at local colleges and focusing on his photography including his Yosemite series *California’s Cathedral of Spirit*, currently on display at the historic Library and Courts Building. But he’s offered his administrative and craftsman expertise part-time to the Foundation as well.

Most photography aficionados in the Sacramento region and beyond who have been working prior to the digital boom are familiar with Kennedy’s work. He was an art gallery director, has taught at more than a dozen educational institutions (currently at Butte College), and has photographs in collections at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and the California State Library, among others.

Kennedy is most admired locally as the ambitious photography lover whose business served as a creative lab for photographers for a decade between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s. He was the founder and original owner of The Darkroom, a do-it-yourself photography rental lab in east Sacramento. The facility served many budding photographers along with professionals intent on crafting their own final products.

I, myself, have known Gene Kennedy for decades, first as a student of The Darkroom workshops, and later as an apprentice work-
ing at The Darkroom behind the counter, prepping chemicals and cleaning trays in exchange for the opportunity to learn photographic craftsmanship that would typically come with a high price tag at an arts school.

**Master Craftsman**

Kennedy grew up just outside San Diego in the 1950s and '60s. He received a 35mm camera in high school and began a years-long affiliation with nature and wilderness. When he entered college at San Diego State, he expected to leave as a high school math teacher an ambition he chuckles about now. "I have no idea what calculus is anymore," he said.

It was a geology professor by the name of Baylor Brooks who ignited Kennedy's passion for nature photography with the gift of two Sierra Club Exhibit Format books, *Time and the River Flowing: Grand Canyon*, which featured the photographs of Philip Hyde, among others, and *Glen Canyon: The Place No One Knew* by Eliot Porter.

Porter’s color images of Glen Canyon of the past inspired Kennedy, especially because Glen Canyon was drowned into Lake Powell, one of the largest man-made reservoirs created by damming the Colorado River on the Arizona-Utah border. The images were taken with large-format cameras, which allowed for incredible detail. It inspired Kennedy to learn the technique. "I purchased every large-format book I could."

"At that point I was an Ansel Adams groupie," said Kennedy. He was particularly keen on Adams’ and other photographers’ "Zone System" for black and white photography, using a scale of ten variations of gray, from pure white to pure black, to determine the technical settings for film exposure and development. As he learned and perfected his craft, Kennedy focused on landscapes beginning with environment and nature, but eventually turned to man’s imprint on the landscape. There’s a constant theme in much of Kennedy’s work that could be described as man’s interference with Mother Earth.

For State Library supporters, this may sound familiar. Years ago, the Foundation and State Library acquired a collection of Kennedy’s prints of new subdivisions being built on otherwise pristine open land in Southern California. Gary Kurutz wrote about the pieces in the State Library Foundation...
Bulletin in July 1990, in an article titled “Violations of the Landscape: The California Photography of Gene Kennedy.” View Camera magazine in 1989 had a similar take — “Gene Kennedy: Ravaged Landscapes” was the title of that article.

As Kennedy explained to David Best in 2012 for a profile in Black and White magazine, at some point Kennedy pivoted from the beautiful landscapes and began to focus on the disruptions. “I saw cul-de-sacs as metaphors because I saw all this development as a dead end. It doesn’t seem sustainable,” he told Best for the article. Kennedy saw the same sense of loss in California’s dwindling reservoirs during the long drought that ended in 1992 and captured these landscapes as well.

One notable non-landscape subject from Kennedy was the buildings and acreage of Gladding, McBean, the historic ceramics company in Lincoln, founded in 1875, that specializes in everything from sewer pipe to architectural terra cotta. The company’s artisans had a significant impact on California architecture in the first half of the twentieth century, including the rebuilding of San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake, the iconic Spanish-revival buildings at Stanford University, and even the façade of the historic Library and Courts Building. The company’s manuscript and photo collections are preserved at the California State Library and include over 10,000 film and glass-plate negatives of the artists and their works for over 6,500 architectural terra cotta projects.

Kennedy learned about the factory when he lived in Lincoln in the 1990s and served as a docent for the immensely popular “Feats of Clay” exhibition, an annual national competition of fine-art ceramics presented inside the “pottery.” A tour of Feats of Clay included a tour of the pottery. “It was a living museum,” he said of the decades-old factory containing huge kilns, the machinery of production, old pottery molds, and the remains of ceramic objects from the past century.

Kennedy took groups of photographers to the pottery for workshops for 16 years and was able to make his own images at the same time. The results are a dynamic series of photographs of architectural craftsmanship, the environment of historic century-old buildings, and finely sculpted figures in clay, left from decades of production.
Yosemite Falls with Dirt Pile
Maintenance Yard, Yosemite Valley, Mariposa County, California, 1991
Gelatin silver print

Marina and Smoking Hillsides
Glory Hole Recreation Area, New Melones Lake, Calaveras County, 1988
Gelatin silver print

(Opposite Page)
From California’s Cathedral of Spirit Exhibit
Photographer’s Holy Place
Leidig Meadow, Yosemite Valley, Mariposa County, California, 1980.
Archival pigment print.
Northern California has been a quiet hub for photography since the early days of its invention. The images of Yosemite by Ansel Adams are burned into the minds of the general public, but the majesty of California’s wilderness started with an early master of the craft, Carleton Watkins. Watkins was the first to produce multiple images of Yosemite that were seen by the general public, and the State Library has a large collection of his images and negatives. Yosemite was a favored subject for Adams and Watkins and Kennedy too. His prints on display on the first floor of the Library and Courts Building bear a resemblance to Ansel Adams’ and Carleton Watkins’ work in setting and obvious love of nature, but also its disruptions.

Kennedy’s images include the imprint of humans on the environment, imperfections in this otherwise perfect landscape, a photographic image of perfect imperfections. Kennedy’s prints are meticulous in their craft, with minute details in black and white, the full Zone scale utilized. The images themselves, however, depict flaws: a downed and cracked tree, a line of trash cans in nature’s cathedral of Yosemite Valley, a perfectly round hole where it shouldn’t be in a...
natural landscape, obviously created by man.

“He often has a dividing line in his photos showing what man has done to the natural world,” noted local photographer David Dawson, who studied with Kennedy in the 1980s and ’90s.

**Legacy of The Darkroom**

One of Kennedy’s greatest accomplishments was likely also the most difficult: owning a small business, especially an artistic small business. Kennedy created The Darkroom in Sacramento in the mid-1980s after leading a gallery at a community college in San Diego County. Life changes inspired the move as well: his father died, which inspired a sense of purpose and direction while also providing capital to invest. The result of this investment led to a unique location for community and artistic inspiration.

Many local photographers were referred to The Darkroom and Kennedy’s teaching by local photography professionals. Dawson discovered The Darkroom after a suggestion by a professional photography lab in the early 1990s, and within a year he was back in community college taking Kennedy’s large format course, despite a distinguished career as a working professional for the State of California for decades.

The lure of the craft was part love of art, part science, but also part camaraderie. The Darkroom was clean, supplied with accurate chemistry that was made fresh, and correctly calibrated high-end equipment. “It was a well-manicured laboratory,” noted Dawson, one that rivaled the most expensive art schools.

But it was the spirit of collaboration and sharing of ideas that The Darkroom and Kennedy truly nurtured. Kennedy was constant in his willingness to share advice and technique tips, and never imposed his own sense of artistry on others. He’s not about imposing his artistic sense on others, noted Dawson. “Gene is dedicated to (helping create) the best photo possible, period.”

For many photographers, the craft can be a lonely one. Kennedy combated that by investing in creating a community at The Darkroom. The facility became an artistic playground, as professionals willingly provided advice to novices, and experienced photographers helped each other. That sense of high quality and community lives on throughout Sacramento with establishments like the Viewpoint Photographic Art

(Opposite page)
*The Edge of Spring*
Northeast of Bakersfield, Kern County, California, 1985
Gelatin silver print

(Above)
*Southern California Land Development*
*Summit Pointe Development*
Chula Vista, San Diego County, California, 1983
Gelatin silver print

(text continued on p. 30)
Snake in the Desert
Palms-to-Pines Highway, Palm Desert, Riverside County, California, 1981
Gelatin silver print

Gladding, McBean
Practice Faces in the Window
Figures for City College of New York Project
Former Modeling Area, Third Floor, Gladding, McBean, Lincoln, Placer County, 1996.
Silver gelatin print.
Center, a photography collective currently on J Street in Midtown that has dozens of members who first learned the craft at The Darkroom under Kennedy’s tutelage.

“Gene’s high standards are lurking in the background,” said Dawson of the work at Viewpoint. “They certainly are with me.”

Kennedy sold The Darkroom in 1996 to a former employee. By the early 2000s, digital photography advanced and do-it-yourself labs nationwide closed their doors. The stand-alone facility of The Darkroom was shuttered, and the best of the equipment and business name was shuttled to and eventually absorbed by another photography-related business: PhotoSource.

Kennedy continues to make film negatives but prints using digital technology now that the printers have caught up to the quality of chemical printing. But, just as important is the storage of pictures. Saving the original image on a computer without a physical product unsettles Kennedy. “I like to be able to hold my negatives,” he said. “I feel confident they will last. I don’t know if that’s true with digital files.”

Today Kennedy is teaching at Butte College part-time. His knowledge and understanding of film photography, archival storage, and the processes that went into historic images can be a key asset that Kennedy brings to the Foundation. But equally important is his generosity, professionalism, honesty, and sense of teamwork.

Mary Beth Barber is the special projects coordinator for the California State Library, and at one time took workshops from Kennedy and other local photographers, shot hundreds of rolls of 35mm black and white film, and spent a great number of hours in The Darkroom as part of Sacramento’s creative photographic community.
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