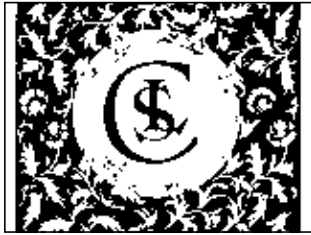


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Back Cover: Mistletoe in Oak Tree Mt. Diablo State Park Contra Costa County, 2009. Archival pigment print. See article on Gene Kennedy, p. 22.

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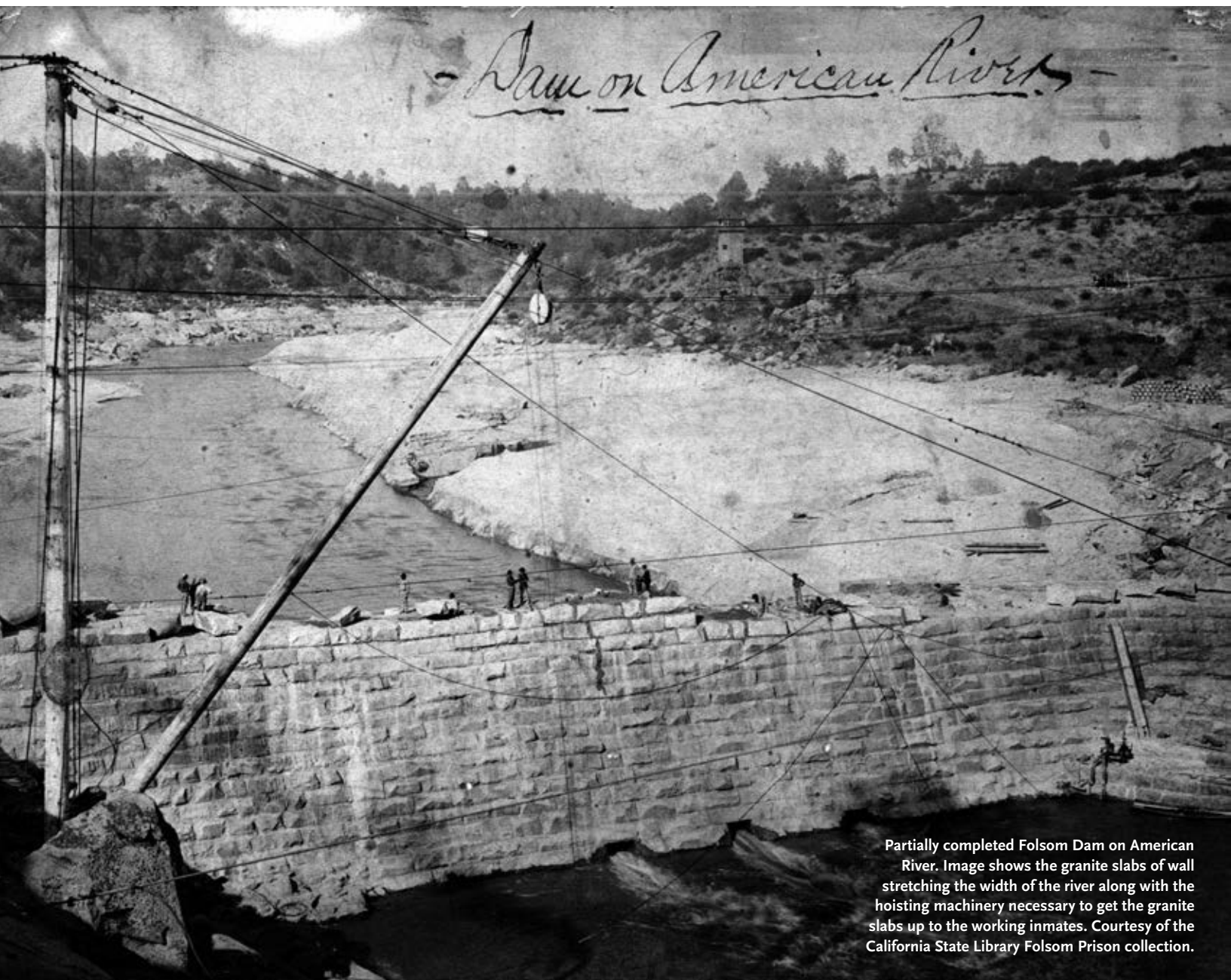
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Stories of Folsom Lake, Its Dam and the Electrification of Sacramento

By Brittneydawn Cook



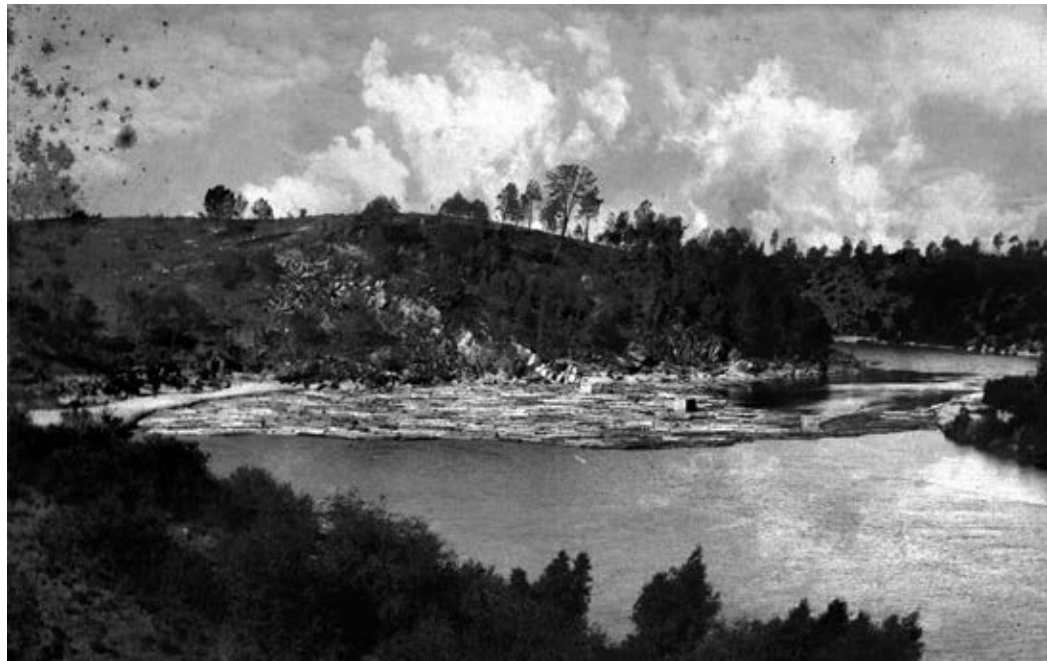
Partially completed Folsom Dam on American River. Image shows the granite slabs of wall stretching the width of the river along with the hoisting machinery necessary to get the granite slabs up to the working inmates. Courtesy of the California State Library Folsom Prison collection.

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.

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.

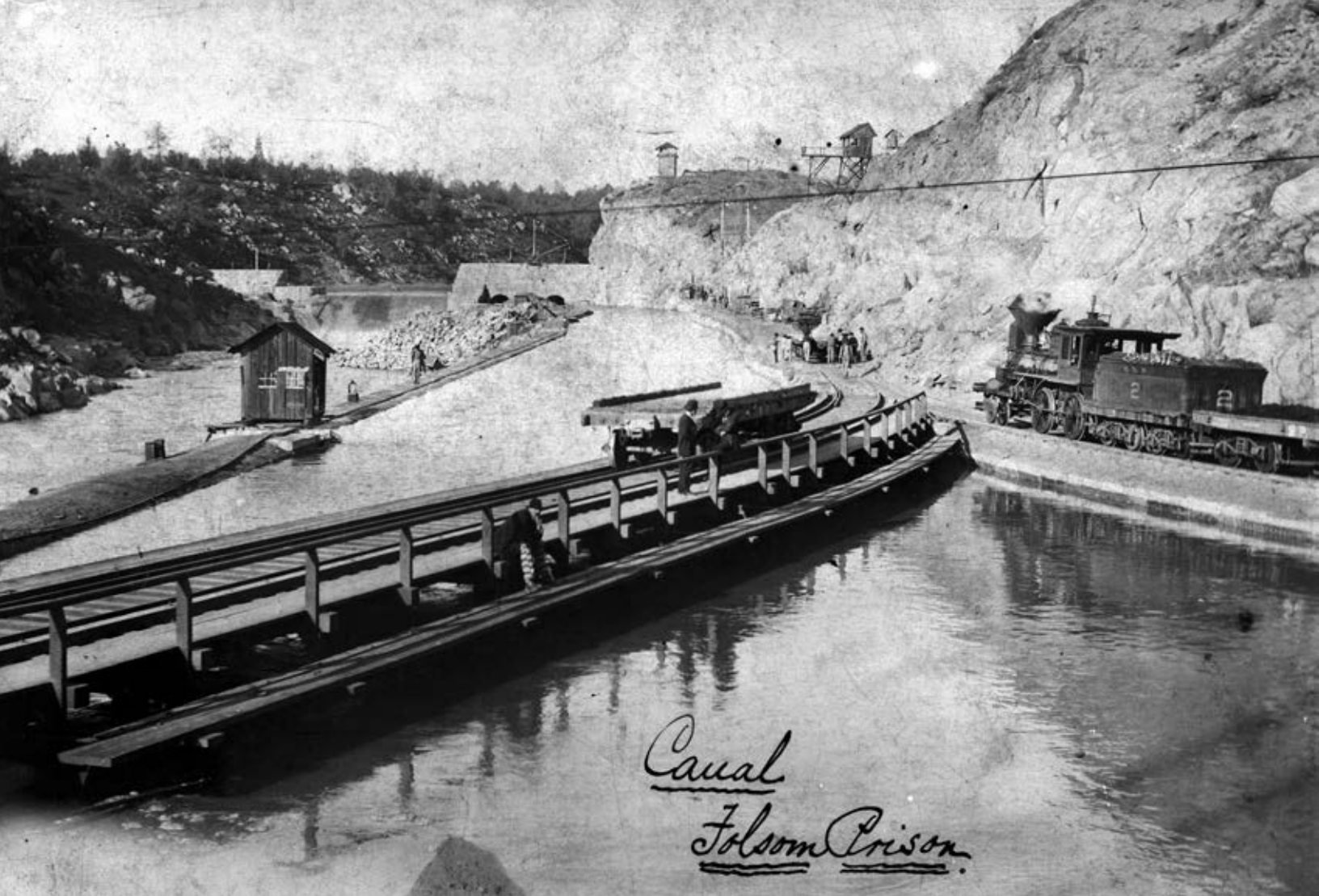


Log boom on the American River at Folsom.
Courtesy of the California State Library Folsom Prison collection.

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

Brittneydawn 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.



The Canal at Folsom Prison. Image shows canal with railroad bridge and a locomotive to the right hand side. Inmates can be seen loading a railcar while being watched from the guard towers above. Courtesy of the California State Library Folsom Prison collection.

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



Folsom Prison Powerhouse with dam in the background. Courtesy of the California State Library Folsom Prison collection.

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. Hollister, 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