



Folsom. At first, it was the gold camps – Mormon Island, Negro Bar, Willow Creek, Prairie City – that drew them here. After the gold panned out, what kept them coming was the railroad – and a Sutter Street that rocked.

The promise of gold and, later, silver, the first railroad in the West, and hospitable merchants, bound together by a visionary spirit – these are Folsom's roots. Gold lured adventurers. The town's founder, Capt. Joseph Libby Folsom, brought the railroad and, with it, enduring prosperity. And enterprising shopkeepers built an eclectic Sutter Street that is still Folsom's historic centerpiece.

In today's placid Folsom, you have to stretch your imagination to conjure the excitement that marked the 1850s and '60s here. But the city has preserved enough of its past that a stroll through a few blocks around Sutter and Leidesdorff streets can evoke images of that bygone time.

**First, a site you won't see: Negro Bar.** Although Mormon Island later was part of the town, Negro Bar is the camp that became the city of Folsom. It was the third mining site in the state. No trace of it remains, but the camp – little more than a collection of tents and shacks – was first worked by African Americans along the American River below Leidesdorff Street. Who these miners were is unknown, but Negro Bar State Park, across Lake Natoma, honors them.

**Next came ... the railroad or the town?** After gold was discovered, Capt. Folsom resolved to build a railroad town at Negro Bar, on land he owned, before there was a railroad in California. In 1852, he joined with a group of businessmen to form the Sacramento Valley Rail Road. The men hired the famed engineer Theodore Judah to survey a rail line from Sacramento to a depot that would be built at Negro Bar. Judah also surveyed the town of Folsom – originally called Granite City – and built a railroad trestle where Rainbow Bridge stands today.

Capt. Folsom died in July 1855, three weeks before the first track was laid, and the town was renamed in his honor. On Feb. 22, 1856, the first train on the first railroad west of the Rockies steamed into the new Folsom depot. Folsom already had a hotel, which celebrated by holding a ball that lasted until 5 the next morning.

This was the first day of many years of lively activity on ...

**The railroad block:** The bustle at the rail yard during the day rivaled the frenzy on Sutter Street at night. The area, bounded by Sutter, Leidesdorff, Reading and Wool streets, was a 19th-century transportation hub. During the Gold Rush, and later the Nevada silver rush of the 1860s, Folsom's rail yard was reported to be the largest stage coach and wagon train staging area in the country.

Three trains a day brought prospectors to Folsom. They started out on boats from San Francisco, caught the trains in Sacramento and disembarked in Folsom – the end of the line – to hop into dozens of waiting stage coaches that would hurry them to the mines.

At the same time, huge freight wagons and mule teams picked up supplies and mail to be transported out. To add to the furor, greeting the trains was a favorite pastime of Folsom's residents – especially when it came time to turn the engines. That brings us to

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**The railroad turntable:** Since Folsom was the end of the line for the Sacramento Valley Rail Road, the trains had to be turned before they could head back. That was accomplished using a turntable like the 1891 A-frame model now standing near the middle of the railroad block.

Several turntables were built at different times on this site. The first one was erected in 1856 and, with the railroad, was the first in the West.

Only the engines and their tenders were turned. The earliest turntables required several men to push them, so eager onlookers nearly always pitched in. But the later A-frame models were so perfectly balanced that a single person could turn an engine. That was pretty remarkable: Engines and tenders weighed 70,000 pounds.

The last turntable was dismantled in 1913. Its foundation lay buried until the site was excavated in the 1990s.

Within the next two years, the turntable will be central to a renovated railroad block that will add businesses, residences and parking while preserving the area's history. If you want more information on the turntable or Folsom's railroad history, you can find it at ...

**The railroad museum and interpretive center:** The original Folsom depot stood at Wool and Leidesdorff streets. Today, that corner is occupied by a later depot, a train museum and an interpretive center. Members of the Folsom, El Dorado and Sacramento Historical Railroad Association operate the museum out of a Santa Fe coach rail car, next to a shiny red Southern Pacific caboose, on Saturdays and Sundays from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The Folsom History Museum runs the interpretive center, which features a blacksmith shop and artifacts of Folsom's past. It's open Thursday through Sunday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., weather permitting.

The center shares the grounds with the Folsom Chamber of Commerce, which is housed in a 1928 depot (the original burned down). There is another train station there, however. The Ashland depot, built in 1868, is the oldest depot still standing in the West. It served the community of Ashland, now the part of Folsom that is north of the river. The structure was moved to this site in the 1970s.

As more services came to be offered in Folsom, prospectors who had struck good luck at the mines often found this town was an inviting place to stay awhile, which brings us to the famously lively ...

**Sutter Street:** One historian referred to Folsom in the 1860s as “the most exciting place in California.” He apparently wasn’t exaggerating. Sutter Street was widely known for its saloons and gambling houses “running at full blast.”

Former Mayor Jack Kipp used to tell tour groups that the western end of Sutter Street boasted so many saloons – Blue Bank, Boomerang, Grey Hound, Magnolia, Snug, to name a few – that the stretch became known as “whiskey row.”

At the eastern end of the street, the designation changed to “city of hotels.” By 1859, there were six first-class hotels in downtown Folsom, each professing to be the largest and grandest. The Folsom Hotel, which stands now at Riley and Sutter streets, was built in 1885. The bar inside is worth seeing: It was crafted by a longtime Folsom resident, Italian-born Giuseppe “Joe” Murer, who also built the Italianate “Murer House” on Folsom Boulevard.

As the successful miners returned to town with their samples, Folsom needed banking services. In 1860, C.T.H. Palmer and Roger Day opened the Wells Fargo & Co. assay office on Sutter Street. The Folsom History Museum, at 803 Sutter St., is now partly housed in the rebuilt Wells Fargo building.

The “rebuilt” part of the story is an interesting sidelight: The original Wells Fargo building was torn down in 1959 to make way for a gas station. A group of appalled residents saved and stored the rubble, everything from bricks to doors to ceiling joints to steps and more. In 1976, the lot became available, and the townspeople gathered the saved materials and rebuilt the structure on its original site.

Inside the museum you’ll find a permanent exhibit on the history of Folsom and rotating exhibits highlighted by an antique quilt show every fall. There also is a gift shop. The museum is open Tuesday through Sunday, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The Wells Fargo building is historically significant for another reason. It was a Pony Express stop. This creative, if short-lived, mail service – it ran for 18 months in 1860 and 1861 – used a relay of horses and riders to deliver mail in only 10 days from St. Joseph, Mo., to Sacramento. For the first six months, the riders changed horses here on their way to Sacramento, but for the remaining year, Folsom was the final destination, and the mail was loaded onto trains for the rest of the trip. The Pony Express was discontinued in 1861, when the transcontinental telegraph came into use.

The character of Sutter Street has changed dramatically in 150 years – antiques stores, bistros and a candy factory in place of saloons, stables and blacksmith shops. But the architecture has been so well preserved you can experience a 19th-century main street as you stroll on the wooden sidewalks, under the awnings, and notice many of the original facades. Those buildings could tell such stories.

The Folsom Economic Development Corporation, with support from the city of Folsom

and the Folsom Chamber of Commerce, is working to revitalize the historic downtown. The broad goal is to make the area more attractive to 21st-century visitors while preserving the integrity of its unique history.

The raucousness that defined Folsom's early years lasted only until 1870. By then, the mining activity had dwindled, the railroad shops were moved to Sacramento and life settled down. The trains, though, continued to roll into the Folsom depot until 1976, bringing people and prosperity, just as Capt. Folsom had envisioned they would more than a century before.

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## JULIE BOWEN STORY

One of Folsom's lights went out when Julie Bowen died on March 16, 2006.

Known for her sense of humor and her impeccable appearance, Julia Frances Quinn Bowen tackled every day of her 92 years with gusto. In 1981, she was Folsom's Woman of the Year. Generations of future Folsom historians will have her to thank for preserving thousands of photographs now on file at the Folsom History Museum.

Born in Eureka in 1914, Bowen spent part of her childhood in an orphanage. A gifted musician, she helped pay her way through San Juan High School in the first years of the Depression by playing piano for Friday night dances. At 17, she married Daulton "Rebel" Bowen, a Navy man from the South. The couple had two sons, Bob and Doug.

The Bowens moved to Folsom in the 1940s, and Julie, always independent, went to work as a typist for bookkeeper Ella Ellis. A few years later, she became an insurance agent, one of only two women agents in Northern California at the time. She liked to tell the story of the longtime client who left the firm when he learned it was owned by women. A few years later, the client came back. "That was my shining moment," Julie told this interviewer in 2005. "I told them to take their request and shove it."

Julie's son Bob later joined her in the business that became Ellis & Bowen Insurance, long a fixture on Natoma Street. Julie retired from the firm when she was 70, but she was never idle. She continued to play the organ, her favorite instrument, in a Folsom church and was known for her weekly visits to nursing homes.

In 1991, the History Museum manager, the late June Hose, suggested Bowen might help organize the "hundreds and hundreds" of pictures stashed in boxes in the museum office. She took on the task, researching and referencing every photo, never dreaming, she said in the 2005 interview, that she'd still be at it 14 years later. It was a tedious job, she said, "good for an old lady." Her collection is now being recorded digitally so that photos can be made available to researchers.

Julie, always svelte, never lost her elegance. Even at 92, her hair was perfectly styled, her attire contemporary and professional. She walked with a quick step, conversed with wisdom and humor. She added sparkle to any gathering, and she will be missed.

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## JACK KIPP STORY

At Jack Kipp's funeral in June, his friend and neighbor John Stroud welcomed mourners to "the town that Jack built."

Neva Cimaroli, seconded the sentiment. It's not a figure of speech, she said. "Folsom is, very literally, the town that Jack built."

Stroud and Cimaroli can tick off a long list of Kipp's contributions to this city: water rights, shopping districts, auto mall, SMUD annexation, City Hall (which bears his name and likeness), Redevelopment Agency, Folsom Lake College, library, hospital.

"Everything in Folsom has some mark of Jack Kipp," Stroud said, "even the hospital he died in."

John E. "Jack" Kipp Jr., 85, already a legendary Folsom mayor, died at Mercy Hospital of Folsom on May 26.

Folsom didn't have a hospital in 1960 when Kipp's daughter sliced her foot in a lawnmower. Kipp took her to a convalescent home where a nurse applied a tourniquet, then drove to a hospital in North Sacramento. After the ordeal, Kipp and his wife, Marie, vowed to build a hospital in Folsom. Twin Lakes Hospital, which became Mercy Hospital of Folsom, opened on Feb. 19, 1962.

Kipp, a fourth-generation Folsom native, was born at the family's Mormon Street home on Sept. 6, 1920. His father, John E. Sr., owned a grocery store on Sutter Street.

He and Marie married in 1943 in the old St. John's Catholic Church. In the 1940s, he started J.K. Appliances on Sutter Street, which he owned until 1980.

For 60 years, from the the city's incorporation in 1946 until he died, Kipp worked to build Folsom into a first-class community. Unfortunately, he didn't live long enough to learn that in August Money magazine named Folsom the 34th best place to live in America.

Kipp served 24 years on City Council, from 1958 to 1974 and again from 1986 to 1994. He was mayor for 21 of those years.

"Perhaps his most significant legacy," said another friend, Orville Wegat, "is Folsom's

growth. When he took office in the 1950s, Folsom was a quaint town best known for its prison. ... When he left office in 1994, it was a ... home to high-tech companies.”

Cimaroli, who owns Pinebrook Village, credits Kipp with near-prophetic foresight in understanding the services growth would demand.

Water, for example. In the 1960s, Kipp acquired 33,000 acre feet of water from the Natomas Company. He also brought San Juan Water District water to Folsom’s Ashland area, which had only wells.

Long before the need was apparent, Kipp secured the donation of 150 acres of land on Scott Road, then a country lane, for a future college. Folsom Lake College operates there now (and Scott Road has become East Bidwell Street). When Sacramento County closed its branch library here in 1993, Kipp worked to designate an unused city building for a new library and led the effort to revert the county’s library tax revenues to Folsom.

Kipp understood that sales taxes were the basis for a community’s financial health and worked to bring shopping districts to Folsom. He led the way by moving J.K. Appliances from Sutter Street to East Bidwell. In 1988, through his efforts, Folsom’s first regional mall, the Premium Outlets, broke ground. Today, Folsom ranks first in the county in average sales per capita, a mark of strong financial health.

In his later years, Kipp bestowed a new gift on his town – its history. He wrote weekly columns, well-researched and delightfully written, preserving Folsom’s past.

Any one of Jack Kipp’s contributions would have been a powerful legacy, but, for this former mayor and shopkeeper, the whole town of Folsom is his memorial.

Imagine, John Stroud mused in his eulogy, what he would have accomplished if he’d been born in Chicago or Boston.

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