

RED BANK & MORMON ISLAND

February 2014

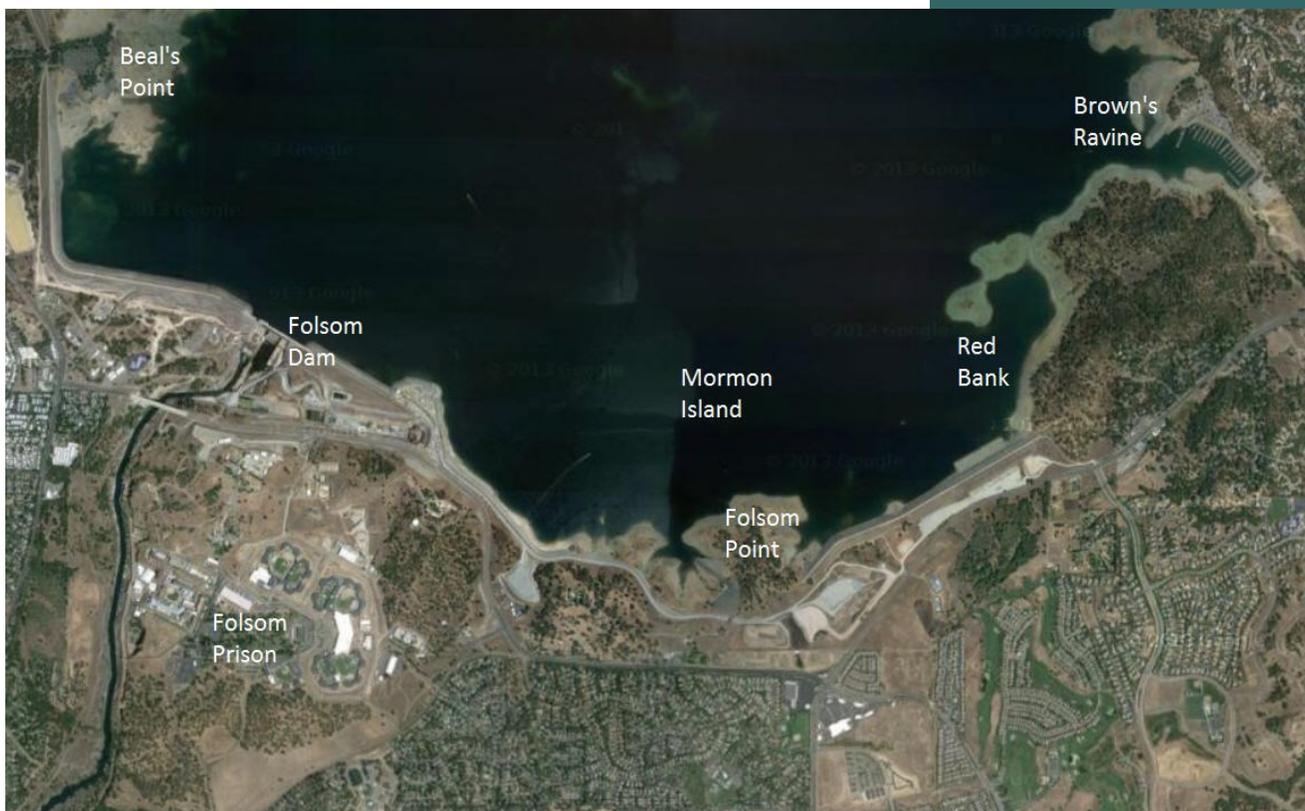
In a drought year at Folsom Lake, the visible ruins between Folsom Point and Brown's Ravine was the community of Red Bank. It is often mistaken for the more well-known community of Mormon Island which was located about a mile away and remains under water even during drought years.

Red Bank had a mine, a winery, and eventually a dairy. It also included a few orchards and ranches nearby. In its heyday, the Red Bank Winery produced 40,000 gallons of wine and 7,000 gallons of brandy every year.

Both communities were flooded in the early 1950s when Folsom Dam was completed. According to a 1950 newspaper clipping, 20 pioneer communities lie under the Folsom Reservoir. The largest of those communities was Salmon Falls which had about 3,000 residents in 1860. The community of Mormon Island peaked with its population of about 2,500 residents in 1853.

Help Us Protect the Park

Historic sites within Folsom Lake are protected by Federal laws and regulations, including the Archaeological Resources Protection Act. It is therefore illegal to remove, deface, or disturb any architectural features or artifacts, or historic objects. Please help protect these historical resources by leaving all objects where they are found. No metal detectors are permitted.



Satellite map of Mormon Island's location under what is now Folsom Lake

During a drought year, many of the structures you can see in the Red Bank area were part of a water distribution system. The Natoma Company was formed in 1851 to provide water to miners and agricultural interests. They used a complex system of canals, ditches and flumes - referred to as the Natoma Ditch. The water was diverted from the South Fork of the American River at Salmon Falls where the company built a dam in 1852.

What looks like a former a tree-lined road in Red Bank was actually part of the ditch system. The Natoma Ditch provided water for farms, orchards and vineyards - allowing for permanent settlement of the area, and the creation of jobs.

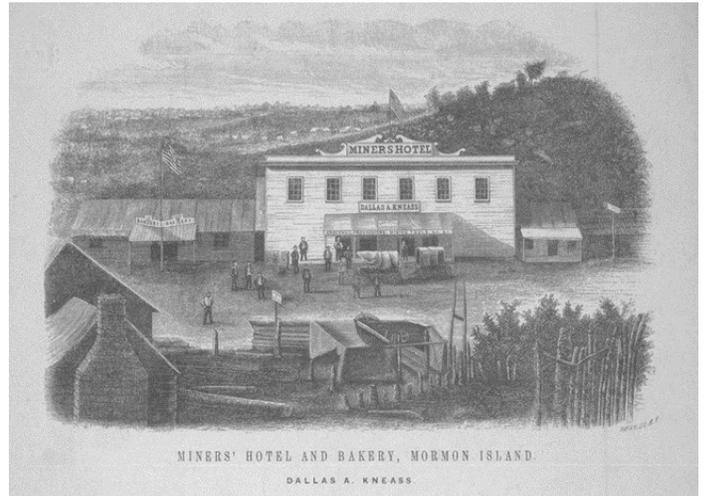
About a mile downhill and Northwest from Red Bank sat the town of Mormon Island along the banks of the South Fork of the American River. Even in drought years, this all remains well under Folsom Lake's water due to its lower elevation.

Mormon Island was located near the confluence of the North and South Forks of the American River and was on the route between Sutter's Fort and Coloma.

Six weeks after the initial discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill in Coloma, a small group of Mormons who came to California as part of the Mormon Battalion began mining for gold at a place they would soon call... Mormon Island. It was one of the earliest mining camps set up after the initial discovery.



The first miners called the camp Mormon Island because they were Mormon and because they had cut a channel across one edge of the gravel bar there, forming a small island.



Within a few months, Mormon Island had over a hundred men, Mormon and non-Mormon alike. Sam Brannan opened a store there. Brannan was a Mormon, a businessman, and a newspaperman who chartered the ship *Brooklyn* to bring 238 members of the church to California in 1846 under the direction of Brigham Young. Brannan secured his place in history as one of the founders of the cities of San Francisco and Sacramento.

Because Mormon Island was a natural stopping point between Sutter's Fort and Coloma, there were two stage lines operating there by 1850. One ran from Sacramento to Coloma, stopping at Mormon Island. The other ran from Sacramento to Mormon Island and back. The town had become one of the main communities of the Mother Lode. In 1851, a post office was established at Mormon Island. By 1853, the population reached about 2,500, and by 1855, Mormon Island had four hotels, seven saloons, and about fifteen other businesses.

The completion of the Sacramento Valley Railroad in 1856 to what was then Granite City (now Folsom) marked the beginning of a long decline for the communities of Red Bank and Mormon Island.

FOLFAN thanks the Folsom History Museum and the Folsom Telegraph for information used in this article.

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