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The Folsoms Of Paloma

By Frances Sowden Kroh

A Calaveras family that has much to tell of the adventures and accomplishments of its early members is the Folsom family of Paloma. Frances Sowden Kroh, a descendant living in Stockton, assisted by her cousin, Ruth Folsom Anderson, has gathered together the historical information about the Folsoms, and has set this down in a particularly interesting family chronicle. We were most fortunate to have Mrs. Kroh present this story at our September, 1977, meeting. Part I of her paper is concerned with the George Folsom family and its origins, and is printed in complete form in this issue. We hope to print the second part, about the descendants of George and Ellen Folsom, in a later issue. And now here is Frances Kroh's story of the Folsoms.

This story had its beginnings in England on April 26, 1638, when the vessel "Diligent of Ipswich" set sail from the mouth of the Thames for Massachusetts Bay. On board, besides others, were twelve families from Hingham, in the county of Norfolk. They all had embarked for the purpose of joining a colony settled in Hingham, Massachusetts, in 1633. The colony consisted of ten families who had been their friends and neighbors in old Hingham.

Among those now emigrating were John Folsom and his young wife, the former Mary Gilman. Mary's parents, Edward and Mary Clark Gilman, and three younger brothers were part of the group. The immediate cause of their departure seems to have been trouble in religious matters.

The party landed at Boston on August 10, 1638, and immediately proceeded to their place of destination, about fourteen miles southeast of Boston. Eventually, John Folsom and wife, with their children, settled permanently in Exeter, New Hampshire, sometime between 1650 and 1655.

George Washington Folsom was born in Groton, New Hampshire, May 10, 1837. He was the son of Nicholas and Hannah Norris Folsom, and an eighth generation descendant of the original colonists, John and Mary Folsom. He had two older sisters, Priscilla and Sarah. This was a happy, close-knit family until September of 1846 when Hannah, the mother, died.

The following year, Nicholas remarried and the once congenial household changed with the arrival of the new wife, Polly. George and his step-mother were incompatible; he felt he and his sisters were treated unfairly. The dissatisfaction at home was largely responsible for him leaving his beloved New Hampshire at the age of sixteen.

The tales of gold in California decided his destination. He



GEORGE AND ELLEN FOLSOM
From Family portraits taken in the
early 1870's



FOLSOM GIRLS
Winnie, Alice and Violet

boarded a vessel bound for San Francisco via Cape Horn. The ship was completely wrecked in a severe storm off the North Atlantic coast. George, one of the fortunate, was rescued by a ship headed for Panama. In later years, he spoke of the kindness and compassion of the crew. All his possessions were lost and he was destitute. They took up a small collection and donated articles of clothing so he could continue his journey.

He traveled by foot across Panama, and at a port on the Pacific side, he boarded a San Francisco bound vessel. He arrived there in September 1853.

Captain Joseph Folsom, a distant relative and also from New Hampshire, was already well established in San Francisco. He had been sent in 1847 to serve as quartermaster under Colonel Stevensen. He invested wisely and the rapid development of the city following the discovery of gold made him very prosperous. George was urged, before he left home, to at least "look up Captain Folsom." This sounded too tame for one now eager to make his own fortune in the gold fields, so he did not follow the advice of his concerned aunts and uncles. (Incidentally, Captain Folsom

never married and he died intestate. His estate, reportedly amounting to eleven million dollars, remained unclaimed and it eventually went to the State of California).

Not too much is known specifically about George's movements during his first ten years in California. We do know he was engaged in mining in various places. He also was an express rider and delivered mail by horseback in several locations. He rode from Stockton to Mother Lode towns and to Sacramento. He later served the Gwin Mine in this capacity. An article in the "Las Calaveras" issue of October, 1958, states: "In the late Fifties and early Sixties the present site of Sheep Ranch and surroundings was used as a summer sheep range by Jaunty Dickens and George Folsom."

Two deeds transacted during the month of May, 1863, in Mono County name George Folsom the purchaser of mining claims. Some old documents indicate that in 1864 he was mining in Amador and Calaveras counties. One deed describes the Mount Pleasant claim situated on the Haupt Ranch.

When Priscilla Folsom, George's sister, came to California is not known, but it is recorded that her marriage to William Webster took place in 1861 and that they resided in Mokelumne Hill. About two years later the three parcels of land comprising the Folsom-Webster Ranch were acquired. Two parcels were obtained through an 1855 Act of Congress granting Bounty Land to officers and soldiers who had been in military service. A warrant for 160 acres was deposited in the General Land Office in favor of Sarah Todd, heir of Peter Todd who had served in the Virginia Militia, War of 1812. This warrant was assigned by Sarah Todd to George Folsom. He patented it in 1875. The next year he deeded a few acres to George Green who operated a way-station in Paloma. The second warrant for 120 acres was assigned to Priscilla Webster. This one was in favor of heirs of Benjamin Barnett who had served in the Illinois Militia, Black Hawk War. The persons named in the warrants were not Folsom relatives. In 1886 Priscilla deeded this parcel to George. The third parcel of 160 acres was homesteaded by George Folsom. It was patented February, 1882.

Mr. and Mrs. Webster, around 1863, were the first occupants of the ranch. They chose the best possible site for a home in a valley where the soil was rich with a plentiful water supply from year-round springs. Upon the death of Mr. Webster in 1868, George gave up his mining interests and came to live with his sister. He now devoted his energies to the development of the ranch. He was a hard worker and in time proved he had a real talent for farming and related activities.

Sometime during the late Sixties, Ellen Maley came to live at the ranch. She was born in New Jersey, January 10, 1856. Her parents were Michael and Sarah Maley and they came to California by covered wagon when Ellen was a young child. They settled not far from San Andreas on Willow Creek.

The Maleys had three more children, the last a set of twins, Andrew and Catherine, born in the mid-Sixties. This was about the time Sarah died, possibly at the birth of the twins. Later, Michael had a serious injury and from then on was unable to care for his



BLANCHE FOLSOM



SAM FOLSOM

motherless children. They were separated and went to live in different homes. Ellen, the eldest, found a place as a helper to Mrs. Webster.

The tattered remnants of some old letters are helpful in piecing together the story of the Folsoms. It is apparent that Priscilla and George corresponded regularly with relatives in the East. Most of the letters are from Samuel Folsom, an uncle living in Indiana, and they cover a period from 1872 to 1876. We can tell from the contents of one letter than in 1872 Nicholas Folsom, father of George and Priscilla, was living with his son and daughter on the ranch. Samuel was curious about the climate of California and how it suited brother Nicholas' constitution.

In another letter there is a hint of a romance developing between George and Ellen. Uncle Samuel writes, "George, are you not married yet? I hope you are. I think that girl has waited long enough." It was at least a year later that the wedding of George and Ellen took place on December 30, 1873.

After the marriage of her brother, Priscilla took up residence once more in Mokelumne Hill. Nicholas Folsom continued to live at the ranch until his death in 1880 at the age of 85.

The family Bible lists the following names of progeny of George and Ellen Folsom:

Samuel G.	June 27, 1875
Mary Ella	September 3, 1876
Alby R.	September 11, 1877
Blanche E.	August 28, 1880
Emery G. (John)	July 27, 1881
Birdie C.	November 3, 1883
Alice M.	February 23, 1887
Edwina C.	January 16, 1889
Violet A.	January 25, 1896

As the family increased, it was necessary to enlarge the living quarters. Additions were made and what resulted was a functional, homey comfortable ranch house. The split-level floor plan would be acceptable by today's standards for a Western ranch-style home. The lower level consisted of a large kitchen, a pantry, and a bedroom. Up two steps from the kitchen was a room referred to as the "dining room" but it was rarely used for that. It was more of a family room. The stone fireplace and the organ made it the popular gathering place. Also, on this level were three bedrooms, a hallway, and the parlor. A porch surrounded three sides of this part of the house. A white picket fence enclosed the front yard. Masses of China lilies bloomed in late winter. Later on came the lilacs and the roses. The large utility porch off the kitchen was well shaded by poplar trees. In the backyard a small building, called "Jack's House", provided extra sleeping quarters. A stone cellar was located close to the creek. Water for home use was furnished by the steel windmill with its tank tower. In another area, there were several sheds, a wagon port, and a well equipped black-smith shop.

A creek separated the residence from the barnyard and the corals. The two sections were connected by a footbridge. The creek



OLD TIMERS AT WEST POINT

G. Sanderson Smith, Bill McGhee, George Folsom, and possibly T.A. Wilson or Sam Haskins, from a snapshot taken about 1915



THE GEORGE FOLSOMS
George and Ellen pose with Blanche, Violet and Winnie (and baby Alex) at the Paloma Ranch

was dry during summer but often gushed during the rainy season. Along the creek, fig trees grew, some to enormous size. A natural spring furnished water for the vegetable garden. Besides a small vineyard, there were fruit trees of different varieties.

A cluster of rocks on the ranch are dented with deep holes worn by generations of Indians grinding their seeds and acorns. On several locations, when plowing, single mortars and pestles were uncovered. During the earlier days, the Folsoms were visited regularly by an Indian couple, Wallie Betsy and Toh. They came with a sack for food and other necessities. Ellen never disappointed them, except once. On this occasion, they spotted a new broom and by their gestures, there was no mistaking they wanted it. Ellen could not give up the new broom but she did offer them her old one. They reluctantly accepted it; a few yards away, in disgust, the broom was thrown to the ground and stomped on until it broke.

During the Eighties, the Folsoms acquired two parcels of land in the present National Forest area above West Point. Priscilla died in 1886 and from her estate George received 168 acres located on Forest Creek. In 1889, they purchased from Ellen's sister, Catherine Lillie, 145 acres known as Hunters' Flat. This land gave them a place to take their cattle to pasture in the summertime at a higher, cooler elevation.

In fact, the whole family spent a good part of their summers at Hunters' Flat. The nearest store was at West Point, so the ranch wagon was loaded to capacity with supplies, allowing just enough room for the passengers. This was not an easy trip; it required a very early morning start and one overnight stop. Only the driver would ride all the way. At the steep hills, all others had to get out and walk in order to lessen the load for the long pull. Alabama Hill was sure to find everybody out and walking. The first day's journey ended when the Mokelumne River South Fork was crossed and the mile long grade was climbed. At the top of the hill, they were welcomed by the Herbert family at whose place they usually spent the night. The children of both families looked forward to this annual get together. It took another full day to reach their destination.

In the early days, George planted an apple orchard at Hunters' Flat. Although sadly neglected, it still produces some fine apples. On his way to the mountains, he stopped beyond Glencoe and planted a tree by the side of the road. It is now sort of obscured by other growth, but it is still there, and it, too, grows a few apples each year.

By good management and industriousness, the land provided a living for the Folsoms. Both Ellen and George were extremely hard workers and the children, when old enough, shared the work load. Some income was derived from raising beef cattle. Locally, they sold milk, butter, and eggs. Ellen was most meticulous in the preparation of the butter, so there was always a demand for her product in the Paloma and Mokelumne Hill stores.

A duty assigned to the girls was the delivery of milk and eggs to customers in Paloma by horse and buggy. At a certain age, the older girls were embarrassed by this chore. Upon arrival at the town limits, they would get out of the buggy and send their

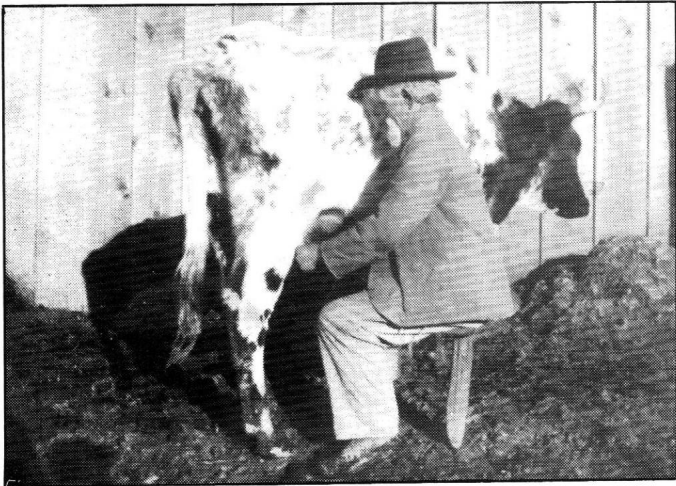


WINNIE FOLSOM WILSON

younger sister, Winnie, to make the deliveries. They waited until she was finished and would then hop back in the buggy for the return home. Winnie still remembers and tells how she was "taken" by her big sisters.

There were uneasy times when it was necessary to go to a money lender in Mokelumne Hill. Old mortgage papers show that on three occasions sizeable sums were borrowed with a ten percent interest rate. One time, foreclosure was perilously close and miraculously avoided. The periods of tight money coincided with "panics" that upset the economy nationwide during the late nineteenth century.

George Folsom was a man with deep religious convictions, so it was natural that he would be a leader in establishing a church in Paloma. A deed to a lot for a building site was recorded August 14, 1899, for the sum of \$10.00. It was between Arey A. Dudley and B.F. Foster, George W. Folsom, and Albert Ludwig, Trustees of the Union Congregational Church. An insurance policy, dated August 24, 1897, to same date, 1900, insured the "one story frame shingle roof, stone foundation building located near the Gwin Mine" for \$500.00.



THIS IS HOW IT'S DONE

Grandpa Folsom shows that he is still adept at one of the familiar ranch chores.

Twice Paloma churches were destroyed by fire; the first occurred in 1910 and the second in 1945. The original stone steps, however, are a part of the quonset building now used for worship in Paloma.

George drove off proudly each Sunday for the mile ride to the Paloma Church. He was most particular about the appearance of the children accompanying him; every detail of dress had to be just so. Any monotony they might experience as they rode along

was relieved by a little game their father had devised. Each turn in the road had been given a special name, such as, Hampshire Grove or Bluebird Hill. He loved to sing and in his fine baritone, he led the singing of hymns.

He was, by nature, very compassionate with a willingness to help someone less fortunate. Ellen could never be quite sure what the returns would be from a trip to market with produce. He could never turn down a request for a loan of five dollars or so, a loan that most likely would not be repaid. As a father, he was kind, though very firm. One time, in order to teach the children to accept life's disappointments, he told them to get ready for an outing. He had the boys hitch up the wagon. When they were all ready to go, he told them they were not going after all.

George instilled in all his children a love of music; singing was as natural as breathing. At day's end when chores were done, the family would gather around the organ to sing hymns and old familiar songs for recreation. Eventually, a piano was acquired and Hugh Watt, an accomplished musician from a neighboring ranch, came to give the girls piano lessons. When Alice and Winnie were sufficiently skilled to play the church organ their father was very proud. They, too, felt it such an honor that they took turns playing on alternating Sundays.

With five attractive daughters and three good looking sons, the Folsom home was a very popular gathering place. Inez Squellati Battilana spent her childhood in Paloma and she has vivid recollections of the ranch. She remembers it as "the hub of the community." It was the boarding place for the local school teachers; visiting ministers always stayed at the Folsoms.



ELLEN AND GEORGE

Ellen Louttit and Inez Sawtelle with their grandparents at Paloma

Ellen Folsom was an exceptionally fine cook; therefore, she had a reputation for the fine food served at her table. It was considered a privilege and a treat to eat one of her meals. Once, a visitor with two small sons, one seated on either side of her, was observed quietly nudging and urging them go, "Eat, Charlie, eat. Eat, George, eat."

The ranch was operated in a progressive manner. The equipment was the best available for the time. Everything about the place was orderly. The cream separator was an example of their willingness to adopt new methods. It was purchased during the later years. Inez Battilana recalls that it created quite a stir in Paloma and the thing to do was to go down and see it in operation. She and her sister, Zita, went one day for this very purpose. Along with the separator, as a bonus, came dozens of booklets containing hymns and traditional songs. After viewing the separator performance, they all sat on the porch steps and sang from the "Separator Books."

When the Big Trees Development Company began purchasing timber rights, the Folsoms, in 1907, sold the timber on the Hunters' Flat and the Forest Creek properties. The trees were left intact for over forty years until the cutting was done by the Winton Lumber Company.

In the early days of routine fire surveillance, Hunters' Flat was used as a look-out station. Jack Cavanaugh may have been the first man hired for this post. His observing was done from a platform located in a tall tree in the meadow. A party line telephone in the rustic cabin provided his contact with stations at Blue Mountain, Dorrington, and Big Trees. When a more fitting station was built up the hill, it took the name "Folsom".

The Hunters' Flat cabin served family and friends for many years. It was used as a base for hunters and fishermen. It became the custom for those who stopped over to carve names and dates. One old door was literally covered with carvings, some dating back in the 1890's. The cabin was destroyed by fire in 1947.

A story of the ranch would be incomplete without mention of the road that passed through the property, directly past the house. It was used mostly by people from the lower ranches to get to Paloma. These could be Youngs, Watts, Haupts, or Gillams, to name a few. There was one, above all, who would most likely be going by. She was Dolly, wife of James Watt, riding her white horse on her way to the post office to pick up the mail each day.

In his mid-seventies, George had a stroke that paralyzed his left side. It was around this time that Violet was graduated from Calaveras High School. In 1914 a house was rented in San Jose for the three to stay while Violet attended San Jose State Normal. This was a new experience for Ellen who had never been away from her Calaveras domain for any protracted time. Family members visiting in this temporary home found her happily adapted to the new environment and thoroughly enjoying herself.

By June 1916, Violet had her teaching credential and a position awaited her in September at Paloma. A permanent move was now made from the ranch to a smaller house in Paloma. As they were getting settled, they welcomed three family members, sister Alice and her two daughters from Alaska. Alice's husband, Lee



THE AL FOLSOMS

Alby Robert Folsom and Mary Agnes Harrington, on their wedding day in Stockton, September 17, 1905.

Louttit, had died earlier in the year in a Nome hospital.

George's stroke did not quell his industrious nature. In spite of a practically useless left arm and a foot that dragged, he would go to an oak-studded area and cut the family firewood. A granddaughter can recall what a pleasure it was to take her grandfather the delicious lunch prepared by Grandma. She was always invited to sit with him and share the very generous portions. He was now eighty years old.

George passed away in Paloma on February 23, 1923. He was close to eighty-six years of age. Ellen lived nine years as a widow. She maintained her home but was rarely alone. Family members were frequent visitors, and her son, John, made this residence his home base when he was not out on a mining venture. She was now free to spend time away and could make lengthy visits to her children's homes. She particularly enjoyed the mild climate of San Diego where Blanche and Alice resided. She died in Paloma on February 14, 1932.



THE JOHN FOLSOMS

John and Josie spent a number of years in Alaska. Here they are at Iditarod.

All the grandchildren have wonderful memories of their grandparents. The older ones were fortunate to have spent happy times at the old place at its peak. There always seemed to be some visiting cousins and there were many fun things to do. One of the best was to sit in the shade of a tree in the meadow to listen and shiver as Aunt Vi told her famous ghost stories.

Grandpa's stroke and advancing years inevitably brought changes. Grandma, younger by twenty years, now assumed the leadership role. It would have been impossible to be around Grandma Folsom and to not be influenced by her whole manner of being. Her calmness and patience were remarkable. Any crisis that arose she could meet with equanimity. And, there were those wonderful meals she prepared with such ease. Grandpa Folsom never lost his rapport with children. He was loved by all the young of Paloma as the ever jovial man with peppermints in his pocket.

Addie Louttit Crabtree writes of a year that she, her sister, Ellen, and their mother spent in Paloma on their return from Alaska in 1916: "When we arrived at the old ranch it was almost time for school to start. Grandma and Grandpa were in the process of moving into Paloma. I had just a few wonderful rides in the buggy before it was sold. Grandpa had had a stroke years before, and he was not the same but he was still fun to be with. Almost every evening, Ellen or I would have a game of cribbage with him. How he loved to win! I don't believe that he, Ellen, and I ever missed a Sunday at church, unless we were sick. Grandpa would stand so straight and walk so proudly with his cane. I can

see him still, with his beautiful white hair and beard gleaming in the sunlight. And he always carried peppermints in his pocket for the children."

Elna Folsom Espenas also has fond memories. "Gram Folsom: Always gentle and kind, and always neat in appearance from the time she arose to bed time. When I was thirteen, I wrote and asked her if I could bring one of my girl friends with me to spend the Easter vacation in Paloma. She wrote back promptly and said my little friend was as welcome as the flowers in May. I never heard her speak a cross word - yet she could be firm in her gentle way."

Reverend Charles Swithenback knew the family well. In an obituary he wrote of the "great hospitality of George Folsom and the whole talented family presided over by a queen."

Frances Kroh's story goes on to record the lives and activities of each of the children of George and Ellen Folsom. We have included pictures of some of these descendants here in this issue.

Sam, the eldest, became a Calaveras rancher, and married Daisy Woolery. She was postmistress at Fosteria (Paloma) for a number of years.

Al was the first of the Folsoms to go to Alaska (1896). He married Mary Agnes Harrington, of Calaveras County, and their two daughters, Nell Folsom Bley and Ruth Folsom Anderson, were born in Alaska. They returned to California in 1917.

John was the second Folsom to go to Alaska, in 1897, and participated in the Yukon rush, there. In 1912, he married Josie Squelatti of Paloma, and the John Folsoms returned to Calaveras County in 1917. Their children were Elna and Rita.

Alice was the third of the family to go to Alaska. In 1904 she married Lee Louttit, of Mokelumne Hill, and went with him to work his mining claims near Nome. Their children were Ellen Louttit Berdel and Addie Louttit Crabtree. Lee died in Alaska in 1916, and Alice and the children returned to Paloma.

Blanche Folsom was the most talented member of a "singing family". In 1897, she married Rodney Fletcher, and when that marriage failed, she became the fourth Folsom to go to Alaska, to cook for her brother Al's miners in Nome. Then, in 1909, she married James Sawtelle at Nome. The following year, Sawtelle tragically perished in a blizzard. Blanche then returned to "the states" with their daughter, Inez. She later remarried again, to Al Calkins, and moved to San Diego.

Birdie Folsom married William Sowden, of Amador City, who was blacksmithing at the Gwin Mine, in 1902. The Sowdens later ranched for awhile in New Mexico, then returned to Calaveras County to take over the Folsom ranch. Two of their children, Frances Kroh, and William Sowden, Jr., are living in Stockton and Santa Clara respectively.

Winnie Folsom was the last of the girls to be married at the ranch. She and Arthur Wilson, of West Point, were married in 1907, and lived in West Point, where they raised two children, Alex Folsom and Blanche Folsom Swithenbank. Winnie remarried in 1940 to J.P. Arthur, and they lived in Arcadia.

Violet, the youngest of the family, married lawyer Joseph Huberty of San Andreas, and their two sons, Joseph and George, follow their father's profession in this town.



SOWDEN PICNIC

Walter Hogan (left), Will, Sr. and Frances Sowden, Anna and Tom Louttit, and Will, Jr. and his mother, Birdie, in the foreground, at the ranch in 1925. Mr. Hogan was engineer and later, city manager, for Stockton. The dam was named in his honor.



OUT FOR A DRIVE

Winnie Folsom Wilson at West Point



ELLEN AND ADDIE LOUTTIT

These two children spent their early years in Alaska. This snap was taken at Council

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WILL SOWDEN
HE TOOK OVER THE Folsom Ranch at Paloma and ran it successfully for many years.

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The Calaveras County Historical Society, a non-profit corporation, meets on the fourth Thursday of each month at the Grange Hall in San Andreas — except for dinner meetings which are held each quarter at different places in the county.

Errata

Mrs. Otta Leonard, one of our sharp-eyed readers, found that we had misspelled Charles Swithenbank's name on pages 17 and 24 of the January issue. The Swithenbanks reappear in this issue, with name correctly spelled.

In Memoriam

Walter Raymond Huberty
Eunice Beal Van Winkle

Illustrations

The pictures in this issue were loaned by Frances Kroh and other descendants of the George Folsom family, including Addie Crabtree, Ruth Anderson and Blanche Wilson Swithenbank

New Members

The Society welcomes the new members listed below:

- Dr. Virgil R. Airola, Stockton
- Mrs. C.D. Anderson, Stockton
- Mr. and Mrs. George Beaman, San Andreas
- Mr. Howard W. Blagen, Mokelumne Hill
- Dr. & Mrs. F.A. Bley, Stockton
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