LACK OF RAIN - ALWAYS A DRY SUBJECT - We are heading for the end of the present 1980-81 rainfall season, and with only the remainder of June in the 12-month period, there’s every likelihood the total for the current season can be tabulated among the 11 in the past 80 years when precipitation has not gone over the current total of 15.12 inches.

Although the current 1980-81 season is ending up on the dry side with only a total of 15.12 inches, precipitation for the past five seasons brings the average total up to between 24 and 25 inches, which is near normal for the area.

Ever since 1957, when the Monticello Dam was completed, creating Lake Berryessa, the storage and distribution of water has been controlled, assuring farmers and municipalities a regulated constant supply.

Reflecting the importance of water from Lake Berryessa on the total gross value of Solano farm products is the 1980 figure of an all-time high of $153 millions.

Without Berryessa water not only farm production but residential expansion would have been impossible. The City of Vacaville gets about half its water supply from the lake source, while in Fairfield all of the water used in that booming city comes from the bike behind Monticello Dam.

Let’s meander back into history and review briefly how Vacaville residents, and farmers, too, were able to obtain the water needed.

Up until 1890, if you were a resident of Vacaville, you had to have your own well and pump. In that year F. H. Hacke and Frank Buck started a small water company, and the first fire hydrants appeared on Main Street in 1891. A small concrete lined reservoir, dug into a hill on Vine Avenue, was the reserve supply. The one well providing the water was on the Buck ranch, just a short distant north of present Buck Avenue.

In 1892, a 30-horsepower steam engine, boiler and two generators were installed by the local utility company and there was sufficient electricity to keep 300 lights burning.

In 1902 the Bay Counties Power Company acquired controlling interest in the Vacaville Water and Power Company, and not much later the new owners ran an electric line to
Elmira to tap a source of power being distributed in the Bay Area by the Yuba Electric Power Company.

In the years to follow, three Vacaville residents, became owners of the water and power company here. They were T. L. Gates, W.Z. McBride and Susan Inglish.

As the community started to grow the ownership of the utility service saw evidence that huge expenditures were to be made to keep up with anticipated growth. They offered their company to Pacific Gas and Electric Company for $175,000 in preferred stock, and PG&E became the sole owner of the water and electricity distribution systems here. That was back in 1927.

The constant problems faced in supplying the community with water was the chief reason for PG&E offering the water distribution system to the City of Vacaville. In 1959, voters here approved the system takeover and issued revenue bonds in an amount of $2,450,000 to acquire and operate the facilities.

Although there is evidence rainfall is diminishing here, statistics will reveal that for the past 120 years, the seasonal average is close to the 25-inch mark. Many farmers in the area, who rely on wells for a source of some of their water supply, will admit the level of water in their wells has increased since Monticello Dam was completed.

When the Vacaville Water and Power Company had its start here before the turn of the century, all endeavors to secure a water supply from below the surface, centered in the western portion of the community and valley. Hundreds of wells were drilled; a moderate amount of water was discovered, but not too deep below the surface was a layer of shale rock which has never been penetrated. At one time the Frank H. Buck Company, seeking to expedite irrigation of company orchards, constructed a huge concrete reservoir below ground level. Pumps, working throughout the night, helped fill the reservoir, and during daylight hours, a larger pump would be able to provide a stream of water to be used in irrigating orchards in less time.

In later years, deep wells were dug east of Vacaville, and holes drilled down 500 feet and more tapped huge streams of water. At present wells helping to supply the needs of Vacaville, are all drilled in the eastern section between Vacaville and Elmira.

Older residents can well remember the hundreds of springs which sprouted water throughout the 12 months. They can well recall Alamo and Ulatis Creeks flowing throughout the year, and many a student going to Vaca High or the Vacaville grammar school will tell of sitting on the wooden Main Street bridge dangling their legs into the dirty waters of Ulatis Creek.
Solano County residents have much to be thankful for when it comes to climate, and geographical location, but too often they overlook the life-blood of the entire area - Lake Berryessa and its river of flowing gold.