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# TGCVHS Newsletter

## THE GREATER CAPAY VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ELIZABETH MONROE — December 2021-December 2022

Volume 2 of 2021-22

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"Democrat" Engraving

**FUN CLOTHES** for resort and patio will be included in the fashion show given Thursday night at Dunnigan hall by members of the Cow Belles, women's auxiliary to the cattlemen's association. Above, in shorts and matching topper is Mrs. Tom Monroe of Capay. The interesting fabric is white cotton with perforated eye-let print. Mrs. H. R. Craig of Esparto wears capri pants and pullover in watermelon pink cotton. The pullover has a button-on hood in pink striped fabric which is repeated in the carryall bag. All clothes in the show will be from Breit's. Tickets for the event are on public sale and may be obtained in Woodland from Mr. Pat Scribner whose phone number is 2-4500.

### The historic Cow Belles—an auxiliary of the Cattlemen's Association.

In the course of researching several local service associations, I came across this news article in a box of memorabilia shared by Dudley Craig: in it is his mother, Dorothy—named herein only as Mrs. H R Craig—and my own mother Jean Monroe, wife of cattleman Tom Monroe. It appeared in the May 23, 1956 edition of the *Daily Democrat*, which means I am just shy of 3 and my brother Robert had just turned 1 in March 1956. Mom modeling in a fashion show—who knew!? And with four 1-5 year old children at home in Hungry Hollow! The clothes were from Breit's Department Store and the show was at Dunnigan Hall. What surprised me most about this was—well, *everything!* Mom made most of our clothes and/or bought them at JCPenney's or Sears—we did not have much money for *store-bought clothes*. And she was known to us to be very private, reclusive even—well suited to a cowboy's wife in the hills—but this seems so *social* and willing to *join*. What a delightful surprise! Thank you, Dudley, I never get tired of little discoveries like this.

Mom and Dorothy always were close—as were their husbands—so the *three Craig boys* just seemed like an extension of our little family. Their great grandfather was Dr. Thornton Craig, Capay's country doctor from the 1870s until his death in the 1920s; he delivered my Duncan grandmother—and maybe yours?

**Speaking of little treasures people have shared with me:** Here is more on **George Coburn**—remembered so fondly by so many of us old-timers.

Recall this photo at right that I had posted in the last Newsletter? That is George Coburn seated nearest us at

Lindbergs bar in Esparto.



## Oldest Capay Resident Will Be 91 Aug. 11

CAPAY — George Coburn, Capay's oldest resident, will celebrate his 91st birthday anniversary August 11.

Son of the late Mr. and Mrs. A. T. Coburn, who came to California in 1870, Coburn was born in Jackson county, Mo. The family moved here from Solano county in 1892.

Coburn worked on the William and W. G. Duncan ranch north of Capay bridge, and after the death of William Duncan he stayed on with the W. G. Duncans.

The ranch is now owned by Mrs. James Monroe of Woodland and is farmed by her son, James.

Coburn's mother died in 1922. His sister, Lucy, former postmaster at Capay, died the following year.

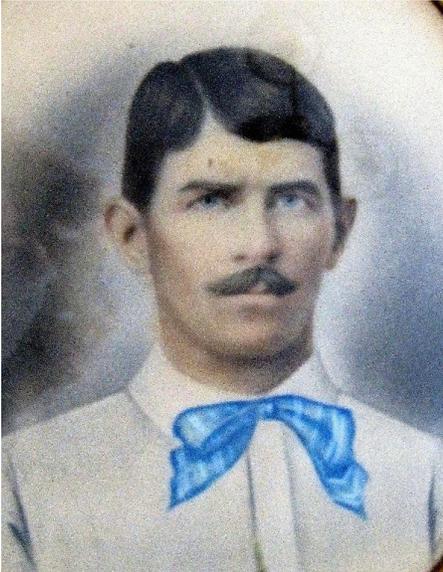
Although most of his friends of the old days are dead, Coburn enjoys talking of the time when mules were used in farming and harvesting was done with threshers.

In late years he has occupied himself with gardening, and he is known for his fine corn, cucumbers and tomatoes.

He has worked with five generations of the Duncan family, and he is looking forward to seeing another generation.

At left is a news article on the occasion of his 91st birthday. It gives his father as A.T. [should be P for Phineas] Coburn who came with his wife Mary Elizabeth to California in 1870 from Jackson County, MO. In 1892 they moved to Yolo County from Solano, where I happen to know they—at least mother and 2 children—settled in the town of Capay. George went to work for my Great Grandparents Wyatt Godfrey and Mary Elizabeth Duncan; while his sister Lucy became the postmistress in Capay. The article's claims of the death order and dates of sister Lucy and their mother are in conflict to the headstone, which shows Lucy died first, in 1921, and their mother in 1923: Their headstone—seen below—stands in the historic Capay Cemetery and shows Lucy 1881-1921 and Mary E. 1838-1923. Below them, our Monroe family added George Gilbert Coburn, August 11, 1869-September 23, 1960, below his mother and sister:





In researching “Grandpa Georgie,” as we Monroe kids called this adorable old man—who never had kids nor grandkids of his own—I found many conflicting pieces of information, from books, news articles, obituaries, to the Census and old-timers’ memories. I will try to get to the bottom of it all someday—*BUT*, for now I just wanted to share what I have been finding. One treasure, this oil portrait at left, was shared by my first cousin Martha Monroe, Jim and Lucille (Nurse) Monroe’s daughter. she was raised with her two siblings, Nancy and Jim, on *The Monroe Ranch* as it was then known, in the historic Duncan home—which still stands north of Capay Bridge on CR85, as it did since built in the 1870s. This oil painting shows George as a young man—not at all how we all recall him. Martha had the original in her home in the Sierras in 2010

when I went to visit. A true Scot—look at those blue eyes! Then another first cousin, William Monroe, son of John Monroe [who raised his 4 kids in Woodland and acted as Deputy Sheriff to his eldest brother Sheriff Forrest Monroe for many years—see the other memory shared by this son “Bill” on page 5 of this newsletter] shared the following memory of George Coburn:

“Another interesting person on the Duncan-Monroe ranch was George G. Coburn. He was born in 1869 and died in 1960 at age 91. Since you were born in 1953, I’m certain you knew him. He was a true cattle-driving cowboy before heading west and going to work on the Duncan ranch. He was hired by our great grandfather Wyatt Godfrey Duncan. I have an old Winchester Model 1894 lever-action 30-30, built in 1913, given to me by my dad. He said that George carried this gun on his saddle while working on the ranch. I remember sitting on George’s lap when we would go to the ranch on weekends.” At right, I added a

photo taken on the Monroe Ranch by my dad, Tom Monroe, in the 1950s of George sitting by Cache Creek as it ran through the ranch—this is the way most of the Monroe Kids remember him.

One of my own fondest memories is of Georgie sitting out in front of his cabin on *The Ranch*, cutting acorns we little kids brought him into rings for our fingers. And of him grabbing me with his cane and pulling me over to listen to him recite Robert Service poetry of the Yukon—his favorites being “The Cremation of Sam McGee” and “The Shooting of Dan McGrew.” He would lay on the thick Scottish Brogue of this *Bard of the Yukon*, a Scot who had settled in the Yukon Territory and chronicled it for decades. When George passed in 1960—being cared for by my young mother at our small house at the far end of the Monroe Ranch—Mom gave me his first edition copy of Robert Service poetry. [see more about George and read my brother Tommy’s poem of George on page 18 of my book *The History and Stories of the Capay Valley*; or volume 1 of the Journals on [greatercapayvalley.org](http://greatercapayvalley.org)]



## Historical Research is filled with challenges—not the least of which is the conflicting data.

Below, I share an obituary that has much that is in conflict to sources like headstones and Census and books like Ada Merhoff's priceless tome: *Capay Valley, The Land and the People 1846-1900*, which can be seen at the Yolo County Library or at the Archives in Woodland: [archives@yolocounty.org](mailto:archives@yolocounty.org) For appointments: 530-666-8010

### GEORGE G. COBURN

George was born in Missouri on August 11, 1869. His parents were Adin Phineas Coburn (1838-1923) and Mary Elizabeth Fisher Chrisman (1840-1910).

Adin and Mary had five children: Evaline (1866-1887), George (1869-1960), Theodore (1871-1877), Ruth H. (1876-1884) and Lucretia Mott "Lucy" (1881-1921).

The 1880 Solano County census showed the Coburns were living in or near Elmira and Adin was listed as a farmer.

George was listed on the Yolo County census of 1900, 1910, 1920, and 1930 as a resident of Capay on the Duncan/Monroe Ranch. His occupation was listed as ranch hand and day-laborer.

His mother, Mary and sister, Lucy, were listed in the 1900 Yolo County census in Capay. It was in 1901, that Mack Nurse died and his widow, Jennie, sold their house in Capay to Mary Coburn. This house still exists at 3<sup>rd</sup> and Main St. in Capay and Mary became the Post Master at Capay. She died in 1910 and Lucy remained in Yolo County until her death in 1921.

George never married and lived for about 60 years on the Duncan/Monroe Ranch in a small cabin near the main ranch house. He passed away in Woodland on September 25, 1960 and was buried next to his mother in the Capay cemetery.

I don't recall now where I got this Obituary, but it conflicts and intrigues—most intriguing to me being that his father lived until 1923—which is actually the date put on the headstone for the death year of Mary E. Coburn, but who herein is listed as dying in 1910—so much to delve into! In Ada Merhoff's book, she also lists AP Coburn of Ohio, 1838-1923 — but these are the dates on the headstone in Capay Cemetery for his wife Mary E. Coburn. **After more research I find:** According to [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com) and to *Find a Grave*: Adin Phineas Coburn was born 4/4/1839 in Ohio; and died 7/9/1884 and is buried in Vacaville-Elmira Cemetery near his first settlement in CA. As I had always heard, Mary E. brought George and Lucy to Capay as a widow. But even all the numerous research sources have yet more intrigue: a Mary Elizabeth Fisher apparently first married a Jehu Crisman in Ohio on 9/16/1856, but he died 10/15/1858; and she then married AP Coburn in Morgan, Ohio on 12/5/1865—so, apparently she had an earlier husband, since her maiden name was Fisher and all the other details match...? For our current needs, at least it appears she was born in *about* 1838 and died in 1923—just as the headstone in Capay Cemetery shows; daughter Lucy preceding her in death. But I also found that Adin's brother may have been Gilbert O. Coburn, [hence George's middle name] who also died in Solano County at 90 on 12/19/1918—I need to get to Vacaville-Elmira Cemetery and look for headstones!—but for now I am going to switch gears a bit and share more from Cousin Bill Monroe...[see more on the Coburns, page 7]

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## *Monroe for Sheriff; 60 Consecutive Years Serving Yolo County, 1911-1971*

**This is the working title for a book I have been writing for over a decade now—honoring the legacy of my grandfather James William Monroe and his eldest son Forrest Duncan Monroe, who have the second and first longest tenures of sheriff in California—maybe the nation?—respectively: “Sunny Jim” from 1911-1938, followed by son Forrest D. from 1939-1971. I swear I am going to get this to print within 2023! That, and get my first (now out-of-print) book edited and the additional 200+ pages of Newsletters added to it to create a new, 2-volume paperback edition—of over 600 pages! This is my New Year’s Resolution!**

**But while I work away at this, I am pulling together some bits and pieces people have continued to share with me—including this from my first cousin Bill Monroe; a memory of his father John Monroe as Deputy Sheriff to our mutual uncle Forrest D. Monroe:**

Bill shared, “...as I’m sure you know, my dad was *rescued* by his brother Forrest in 1946 or early 1947, about the time I was getting ready to enter this world. We actually lived, at that time, in a little shack on the ranch next to the family home. According to my father, he was drinking one day in Tony’s Bar on East Street in Woodland when Forrest came in and told him *You are going to work*—and Dad became a deputy sheriff.

They didn’t have county cars in those days and they didn’t patrol the county on a regular basis. Law enforcement personnel weren’t the deterrent to crime and civil disobedience in those days, it was just the people’s respect for the law. One night a call came in that there was a disturbance at the bar in Capay (I think the name was Louie’s but I’m not certain). My father drives to Capay to see what the problem is [a 30 minute drive]. Well, there’s an enormous man in the bar, drunk and disorderly and threatening the patrons with physical harm. Back in those days and as you know, my father and our family were well-known and recognizable throughout the county. The moment he entered the bar he could hear the shouts from several people, “Okay, settle down, the law is here.” Dad was quickly advised of the situation and he approached the enormous man and told him he was taking him to jail to sleep off his intoxication. The man refused to leave and then resisted arrest. Dad took out his lead-filled, hardwood nightstick and popped him once on the forehead, and the man slumped to the floor. The man was so big Dad asked for some help to take him out to the car—his personal car. They laid the man across the hood so Dad could put on handcuffs. The man’s hands and wrists were so large the cuffs couldn’t close. They put him in the back seat and Dad was off to Woodland and the county jail. However, every time the man would become alert and belligerent, Dad would reach back and pop him again with the nightstick. This happened several times before they made it to the jail.”

Bill goes on, “The end of the story is interesting. Dad surmised the man, because of his largeness, most likely never had a physical rival. The fact my father showed him no fear or trepidation evidently made an indelible impression. The man was an itinerant laborer and every year that he came back to the area he made it a point to stop by the county jail to pay his respects to my father.”

*[NOTE: The book I am writing is mostly drawn from the Memoir of James William Monroe, published by the Daily Democrat Newspaper editor, Paul Leake in 1939; and from the Sheriff Department Scrapbooks donated by Sheriff Forrest D. Monroe to the Yolo County Archives after he retired in 1971—and stories like the one above, of course! I am also including a brief history of the Yolo County Sheriff Department at the request of current sheriff Tom Lopez. I am also researching the tenures of sheriffs in CA and the US—which is why this is taking so long...]*

**Speaking of all those Duncans and Monroes in historic Capay**, as I researched George Coburn—who spent his last 60 years working for them—I came across the following information: “Doc” Wyatt Godfrey and his brother Bill Duncan did not make it out to Capay to graze cattle and then to purchase land until 1857. They had arrived in California via cattle drive in April of 1850, but until then they were working their gold diggings in Mud Springs and running cattle with Dr. E.C. Lane in the Madison area, making enough money to be able to buy land from the state of California as it opened the old Mexican Land Grants to pioneer settlers; the Capay Valley is primarily the *Rancho Canada de Capay* grant. By 1857 they had built their own herd, which “they ran in the southernmost part of Capay Hills and on the gently rolling land where these hills resolve into the Sacramento Valley,” as Ada Merhoff ever-so poetically put it. In 1867 they bought their first 4000 acres north of Capay and continued with a cattle herd—having made their wealth until now selling beef to miners and new pioneers. But when the wool uniforms of the Civil War meant the money was then in wool—followed by other wool markets—California became *the wool capital*, so the Duncan brothers switched to sheep and soon had a flock of about 5000. Their neighbors were also switching to sheep, mostly throughout Hungry Hollow, a dry grain farming and grazing area north of the towns of Capay and Esparto. The Duncans homesteaded at first in “a small cabin and log house in a clearing on the north side of Cache Creek across from Lang’s brickyard” in Capay, according to Ada Merhoff. The structures were presumed to have been built by FS Freeman, who in 1850 had put in 100 acres of wheat on the spot. According to Merhoff, “in 1867 the Duncan Brothers filed the deed to Lot Q and to Lots C and D—over 4,000 acres...”: eventually, 6 Duncan siblings would all settle in Yolo County—mostly in the area Merhoff referred to as “the mouth of the canon”—on about 10,000 nearly-contiguous acres. The valley was filled with Duncans, mostly marrying other pioneers or their descendants, and many of those blood-relatives still farm in the area. The home and redwood barns the brothers built appear in the *Yolo County Atlas of 1879*. Still standing on the left side of County Road 85, many of the structures in the etchings in that Atlas remain: the iconic white home and carriage house and some sadly drooping redwood barns. A few historic trees from a small orange orchard also seen in the Atlas remain—which I am hoping to graft onto root stock!

## Continuing the Research on our own George Gilbert Coburn:

### Source information

#### Title

Handwritten record by Gilbert O. Coburn of his family, written 1907

#### Author

Gilbert O. Coburn (born 1828, son of Theodore and Rebecca (Waterman) Coburn

### Repository information

#### Name

HeirloomsReunited.com

Below, I truncated screenshots of the California Death Index 1905-1939. George Gilbert Coburn will not appear because he died in 1960 and his father Adin Phineas will not appear, having died in 1884; but I believe George's paternal uncle *Gilbert O[Iney] Coburn* is seen at the top having died in Solano County at 90 and below him the 3rd Lucy is George's sister *Lucy M[ott]*, dying 11/21/1921 and the 3rd Mary is *Mary E[lizabeth]*, dying 7/4/1923 — all of whose dates match other records.

COBURN	GEORGE		126	16	61519	15	17733
COBURN	GEORGE	M	165	60	4 818	18	12054
COBURN	GEORGE	WDC	157	17	111322	22	46227
COBURN	GILBERT	O	190	48	121918	18	59175
COBURN	HARRIET	A	187	39	111807	07	28683
COBURN	HARRIET	V AJ	160	60	5 227	27	22896
COBURN	KATHERIN	C	151	90	12521	21	3809
COBURN	LEONARD	ARA	129	54	72723	23	33698
COBURN	LEROY	A	129	33	42708	08	10471
COBURN	LILLIAN	M	149	90	21020	20	8945
COBURN	LOREN	S	192	41	111318	18	50615
COBURN	LUCY	GA	140	43	21028	28	11167
COBURN	LUCY	AJ	184	48	52428	28	28379
COBURN	LUCY	M	140	57	112121	21	45199
COBURN	MARGARET		160	50	92313	13	17840
COBURN	MARGARET	J JB	190	43	91628	28	48319
COBURN	MARY		178	70	13022	22	1731
COBURN	MARY	A	179	31	93016	16	39697
COBURN	MARY	EAP	185	57	7 423	23	33787
COBURN	MERLE	LGH	133	40	6 823	23	50941
COBURN	MILES		140	45	42410	10	11132
COBURN	PETER		155	27	62512	12	21052
COBURN	PHILIP	M	166	33	12 812	12	36480
COBURN	ROBERT		166	44	22221	21	8644
COBURN	ROBERT	WB	181	80	10 718	18	38077
COBURN	ROBERT	FC	150	80	92426	26	44169
COBURN	ROBERT	JF	159	70	61829	29	31722
COBURN	RUTH	LHA	127	30	9 924	24	42890
COBURN	S	A	184	41	61408	08	16736
COBURN	SARAH	G	163	50	10 121	21	40824
COBURN	SARAH	EW	184	80	71720	20	29409

**Speculation:** Since George was born in MO in 1869 and his family came to CA in 1870, they may very well have come by train, not wagon train. I will research those records, of course. If we believe the somewhat error-ridden newspaper article, it has them arriving in Yolo County in 1892—which we find was a few years after Adin Phineas Coburn died and was buried in Solano County in 1884—so Mary came as a 2x-widow with 2 of her 6 children and lived out her life in Capay in a “home with a long screen porch down one side” on 3rd Street and Main that she bought in 1901 from Mack Nurse’s widow Jennie—and where she continued Mack’s job as Post Master (Merhoff; p273); the 1900 Census has Mary and Lucy in Capay, and George on the Duncan Ranch.

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## Interesting Tidbits that come my way—not always with a source...

...like this Ag snapshot from 1856 to 2012:

swamp and overflow land, subject to recurring floods. By 1856, some 28,000 acres of wheat and barley were under cultivation.

Purebred sheep, swine, dairy, and beef cattle were also introduced and the first irrigation and reclamation projects began to change agricultural patterns. Fruit, olive, and grape production, first introduced in 1842, increased markedly in the 1880s, as did the acreage of almonds, walnuts and alfalfa.

Over the intervening years since 1900, improved irrigation, road and transportation systems, research and invention of new technology, led to crop diversification, construction of processing plants and propelled the continuing expansion of Yolo County's predominant agricultural economy.

County statistical reports in 1942 listed 1,386 farms, located on a total of 378,261 acres produced agricultural commodities valued at \$19.6 million. Between 2007 and 2012, the U.S. Department of Agriculture census report listed 983 farms.

Respectively, the acreage was 479,858 to 603,000 acres. In 2012, crop production value was at an all time high of \$645.8 million; \$40 million of which was classified as organic.

**Speaking of Ag in Yolo County, a lot of current focus is on water conservation, adapting crops to greater heat, and sustainable farming practices. Which is why this following article caught my attention:**

***US 'wheat breeders' are developing a crop that can meet soaring demands while defying climate change***, By Heather Waldman, *KCRA News* March 3, 2022

“Wheat is the most widely used crop in the world. It makes up 20% of the calories consumed by humans...Whether it's a loaf of bread or a box of pasta, you've likely never had to worry about whether your favorite wheat-based product is available at your local grocery store. That's because scientists and farmers have been working for centuries to continuously develop a global crop that grows well, tastes good and stands up to threats from disease and weather changes,” according to KCRA reporter Heather Waldman, posted on KCRA News March 3, 2022, under the title, *US 'wheat breeders' are developing a crop that can meet soaring demands while defying climate change*. She goes on to introduce her readers to Dr. Jorge Dubcovsky, a wheat breeder and distinguished professor at UC Davis, as saying, “What's different now is that the climate is changing faster than it was changing before.” This is more important than ever before, because “Droughts are getting longer and more severe and growing seasons are shifting with rising global temperatures. That affects the nutritional value of the wheat and how well the crop grows...Demand for wheat is also expected to skyrocket.” Now add:

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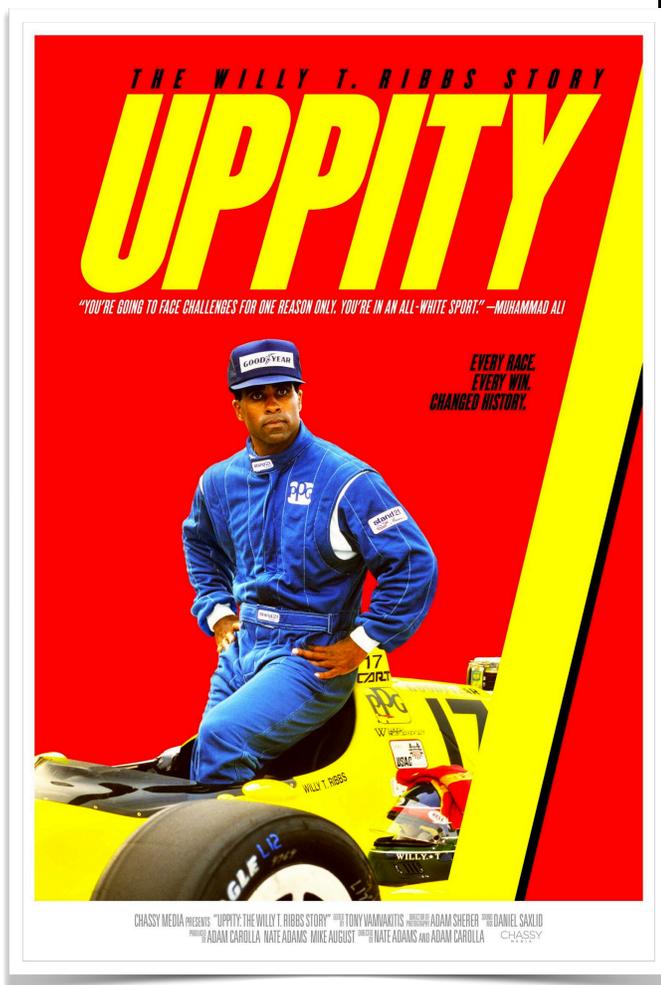
“As of February 24, 2022, a war in Ukraine, breadbasket to much of Europe and the Middle East and Africa, means current wheat production will be severely diminished. And then add this: the world is expected to have “30 billion more people in the next 20, 30 years...” according to Dr. Dubcovsky, which means that “farmers will need to produce wheat faster than ever before while also ensuring that that crop can stand up to extreme weather events brought on by climate change as well as the diseases and pathogens wheat has always had to adapt to...To solve this problem, the USDA recently awarded a grant for \$15 million to a collaborative project that involves 40 wheat breeding programs including Dr. Dubcovsky's lab at UC Davis.” According to this article, the goal is to “shorten the time it takes to adapt to climate changes and develop new breeds of wheat and to educate and train the next generation of wheat breeders while helping them to network.”

This is of interest to me because of the long history of agriculture in our Capay Valley—and also in the rest of Yolo County since the first Euro-settlers—in addition to the sustainable practices of the native people for 8000 years. In the last several decades, the area of western Yolo has moved back to sustainable practices and has hosted the first organic farms in the county—now serving the needs throughout California's Sacramento Valley and the whole Bay Area! I have written quite a bit about the importance of wheat in Yolo county historically in these journals, so this article's focus on wheat, climate change, and UC Davis are interesting.

**And then there is this information about Yolo County Nursing which I found in a clip at the Yolo County Archives—from which I pulled this information and herein focus on our own Capay Valley's Nurse-Midwife Mary Frances Gaither:**

In 1863 the Yolo County Board of Supervisors voted to build its first *healthcare facility*: an infirmary for the “sick and insane.” There were not yet any *county* doctors nor nurses, as such; doctors were usually in private practice—like our own Capay Valley doctor Thornton Craig—and *volunteered* their time to the county. And while we did not have rigorous training in place for nurses, we did have some *practical nurses* who had trained by working for doctors—such is the case with Mary Gaither, who was well trained before coming to Yolo County and then worked under Dr. Craig, furthering her training. Born to former slaves in 1865 in Cooper County, MO., she worked for a white doctor whose ailing young son needed her; and when the doctor saw her great skills, he chose to teach her nursing. By the 1880s, she and her husband made their way to the Capay Valley area, and were eventually able to buy 2 of the inaugural lots in the new town of Esparto, sending their sons to the never-segregated Esparto High School. In her 50 years of nursing in the area, she delivered all the Black infants of the fairly large Black population in Western Yolo, but also perhaps half of the white babies. She later took in the elderly and provided geriatric care in her home, thus creating the county's first *nursing home*—to many of the earliest white settlers in the area, many of whom she had nursed in illness and whose babies she had delivered. **[see more on Mary Gaither and the history of Black settlers in the Western Yolo County at our website [greatercapayvalley.org](http://greatercapayvalley.org), beginning in volume 6 of the Journals, which were bound into the first addition of the book, *The History and Stories of the Capay Valley*—now out of print, but currently being re-edited into a 2-volume set of 600 pages]**

**Another interesting Tidbit:** the racing career of one of our own, *William T. Ribbs*, grandson to Henry and Nora Ribbs of Capay Valley. Willy T., as the racing industry knows him—whom we all knew as *Billy* while he was with us at Esparto High, but that is another story—came to live for awhile with his grandparents. His grandfather Henry had come here to hunt pheasant with a local friend, and they eventually bought an historic farm of about 250 acres between Rumsey and Guinda. The story *Billy* tells is that he was such a maniac racer long before he reached driving age his parents sent him to the windy backroads of Capay Valley to try to quell this instinct. But, as he tells it, instead he took his grandfather’s work truck and taught himself his *racing skills* in the back hills; then attempted to teach his friends those skills in their fancy new cars—hopped up *muscle cars* were all the rage at this time in the 1960s, of course. *Graveyard Road* was a favorite raceway—you know, the windy narrow road that runs by the Capay Cemetery? He has some great, hair-raising tales of spinouts and near crashes...but that is much too long a story for this page, so let me just say that he is finally getting his due in the racing industry and in film and television. First came a fascinating Netflix documentary, “Uppity, The Willy T. Ribbs Story”; and now he is featured in a series for television and has a website to give you all the backstory too lengthy to print here: [www.officialwillytribbs.com/](http://www.officialwillytribbs.com/).



Some of his more notable distinctions are listed in this article—one of many on his website:

**LOUISVILLE, KY (WAVE) - Racing champion Willy T. Ribbs is a rarity in the world of auto racing as very few African-Americans have been embraced as race car drivers. Ribbs is the first black driver to win a Trans-Am race, test a Formula One car, and race in the Indy 500.**

**The movie [Uppity] shows how Ribbs shattered the color barrier in his career. Ribbs overcame death threats, unwarranted suspensions, and engine sabotage to go after his dream.**

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**I was contacted some years back by a descendant of 2 Capay families: Savage and Darby. From her description, they had actually settled in what I would call Hungry Hollow, but were schooled in and taught in the town of Capay in the late 1800s. Her grandmother, Flora Darby Savage, had written a draft of her life with the local school teacher—whom she would later marry—and it is in the process of being edited into a book, whose working title is *Philip Savage - A California Saga, 1850 - 1914*. I was given permission to copy a few charming passages herein to show the setting to be in the mouth of our Capay Valley:**

“Mr. Savage, the school teacher, is coming home with us to stay all night,” cried my schoolboy brother, as with startling suddenness he burst into the quiet living room of our little home in the Capay district, nestled at the foot of the Coast Range Mountains. Mother and I were instantly alert, asking where he was, and all the while putting the little touches to the room that betokened the coming of an honored guest. I had been sitting on the floor surrounded by an array of odds and ends, the contents of the scrap-bag, hunting for something needed in my sewing. As if by magic they all disappeared, and when the young school master appeared at the door, mother, sweet and gracious, stepped forward to greet him and turning to me, demurely sewing by the window, introduced him.

My little sisters, immediately upon the announcement of the coming of the school teacher, had gone with brother to meet him, and so he came in with a tiny hand clasped in each of his own great strong ones, taken possession of on the spot. Mother, too, was prepossessed in his favor, having heard much of him from the children who were daily under his care at the little country school. As for me, quiet by the window, I had heard from several sources of the handsome young man who had come out in the wilds of that Coast Range Valley, and I thought not half had been told. Were there ever such clear brown eyes or such fine dark hair? What other young man ever carried himself with such easy strong grace, betokening a spirit independent, but not arrogant?

Soon father, a gentle scholarly man, came in and greeted the young man cordially, for he had known him for some time, having met him when he gave the examinations for teachers, being county superintendent of schools.

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The life at Capay was very far from that of today. There was no church service except the sermons preached by the occasional minister traveling through the country. The notices were given out at the schoolhouse by the teacher, the schoolhouse being used as a church on Sunday, and for a dance on Friday if the trustees were willing, which they generally were. Nor was there a Sunday School or any of the social activities that go with the organized church. There were very few young people, and those few lived far apart. The only amusements were the dances and the "kissing Bees," as they were called, with the May Day picnic and Fourth of July for a change. We lived too far out to get to a circus often, and I had grown to be sixteen years old without seeing one. But we did have the foothills near at hand, and horses. So, the great thing was a day on horseback, at least with myself and friends.

My father, Robert Randolph Darby, had gone through many changing scenes of early California life before he settled in this beautiful valley. He and his young bride of a few months, Sue Townsend Darby, had crossed the plains in an ox team, making the long trip from Independence, Missouri, to Sutter County twelve miles below Marysville. He killed wild geese and sold them--instead of picking up the nuggets of gold as the fairy tales which were told of the new country would make it seem possible to do. Not for long, however, was father satisfied with that rural life, but must away farther on, until the year of 1866 found him with a delicate wife and four children and an empty purse making an effort to get another start in the world. He homesteaded one 160-acre section of land, pre-empted another, and taught school while the family lived in a shack and held the land. But soon the shack with its shed-like room was replaced by a little home that was known far and wide as "the house with many windows." It was painted a pale pink with white trimmings, and mother soon made it a little bower of green vines and lovely blossoms. Though small, it was a real home, and under its hospitable roof met the best people of the new land, and mother took equal part in all the talk ...

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What I had gained had been hard won, for my luxuriant brown hair had been cut off at the first illness. But, now, as a short, wavy mass, it gave itself easily to the tucking in of pretty flowers under the little combs that held it back from my face. To this end, the flowers that bordered the long brick walk to the gate were always called on for an especially pretty bloom to tuck in when the time for the children to get home from school came around. And in the evening, it seemed right that Philip should help water those selfsame flowers, and what more natural than that there should be more than flowers exchanged—shy glances that told more than words? All the world was surely very beautiful. The pink oleander at the southeast corner of the house had grown to almost treelike proportions and many of its bright flowers were tucked in my hair, and the sweet-scented honeysuckle that covered that end of the porch always brought memories of youth and May time in all the long years that followed. It would be hard to put into words what those days meant to us. Gently, sweetly, and almost imperceptibly unfolded the beautiful flower of our love, as blooms arose, until one day as I sat quietly by that same window which saw our first meeting, unexpectedly I heard the voice of the young teacher as he stepped to the door and spoke my name in tones that called to something in my inmost being. Though the word that followed was not *love*, it came to me as if with a great illumination that he loved me and that I loved him.

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Sufficient unto the days were the joys thereof. We knew nothing of movies, musicals, or plays, and the songs we sang together were full of the sweetness, purity, and romance that ran like a golden thread through ‘Annie Laurie’, ‘Highland Mary’, and such well-known ballads, and on through the lesser ones, such as ‘The Turnpike Gate’, ‘Gathering Up the Shells from the Sea Shore’, ‘Meet Me With a Kiss’, ‘Daisie Deane’, and ‘Maggie By My Side’. Philip was especially fond of singing ‘I Am Talking in My Sleep’ and looking straight at me as he sang with feeling, ‘I love you, I adore you, but I'm talking in my sleep’, as he watched me try to look unconcerned.

Philip and I contentedly filled in the hours as the days full of simple joys slipped by: a horseback ride in the foothills; a walk in the twilight; family gathering around the great, coal-oil lamp in the big living room, for in those days of small box-houses, there were no parlors set apart for company; and sometimes listening to Father or Mother read aloud; or the melody of voices, guitar, or violin. Either of them would read in the old-fashioned way a bit of the Bible, all joined in singing some old hymn, ‘Jesus Lover of My Soul’, ‘When I Can Read My Title Clear’, and ‘How Firm a Foundation’ being among the favorites. Then all knelt while Father, in a short and simple prayer, petitioned the Good Father for a blessing on the little household.

The smaller children and Father and Mother were soon in bed, for early rising meant early retiring. But we two young people would often take down the checker board for a game, which we began but in which we lost our interest very soon. The moves seemed to require much thought and the pauses in the conversation grew long. Just to be near each other seemed joy enough and words were not needed. So, the minutes slipped by until we heard Father call the one word, "Daughter," in a gentle, remonstrating tone. We put the board away at once, and said "Goodnight" to each other. Soon, the house was quiet, and dear Father could have his much needed rest to prepare him for the next day's work.

One of the memorable days of that sweet companionship was May 27, 1872. My eighteenth birthday. By this time Philip had made himself much at home with us. He had brought his own horse and buggy and most of his other possessions to our hospitable home. At his suggestion, I went to school with him that day. Mother prepared a lunch fitting for the occasion...we rode in that buggy behind the fast trotting little sorrel Nell, Philip's treasured possession.

We rode for miles through the waving fields of grain bordered by many wild flowers. To the west rose the wooded slopes of the foothills, still in their emerald dress of springtime green, while to the east the low, rolling, forested hills ranged from nearby old Cache Creek, then north until entering the head of the valley on three sides. Behind them was the green band of cottonwood and valley oaks that marked the course of Cache Creek where it left the shelter of the hills and spread out on the plain on its way to join the Sacramento, and so to the great ocean through the beautiful Golden Gate...

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The days of the autumn went by quickly. The five mile ride, morning and evening, on the easy-gaited little pony brought health to me again, and I learned as much as did the children under my care, though in a different way. The school room was new, of ample size and well-lighted, but the equipment was of the most meager description. Along each side of the room a sloping board had been nailed to the wall to form a desk. Underneath was a long shelf to hold the children's books. Seats were merely benches made of boards nailed to the walls. There were no division in the desks, and the seats must be climbed over when the desks were in use. But most of the time the pupils sat facing outward and the substitute for a desk formed a back for them to lean against. A few maps, a blackboard back of the teacher's seat, and a plain homemade table with a rawhide bottomed chair completed the equipment. No, they did have a well, and a bench by the door with water pail and wash pan and common towel hanging near by, and a broom in the corner with which the pupils and teacher took turns in sweeping out the classroom. The teacher made the fire, with some help by the pupils, for she carried the key. Town ball was the great game of recreation time and was played by teacher and pupils, boys and girls together, with no detriment to discipline, for I overheard an old pupil tell a new one, "She is good to you, but you have to mind her." I never came any nearer to whipping a pupil than bringing a switch from home and putting it up over the blackboard with the remark that if certain conditions were not met it would be used. These conditions were met.

A few words from the Bible were read every morning and all repeated the Lord's prayer for the opening exercise. I could not lead them in singing, though I was supposed to, but that was one of the requirements that was "winked at" in those days, else there would have been fewer teachers than there were. The work with the older pupils went fairly well, but the dear little first graders and their poor little teacher had a dreary time with the old method of teaching the alphabet the first thing. The tiny tots would learn confidently on my lap and say them over and over, but it took a long time to get the letters separately known, they were such seemingly useless things. Friday afternoon after recess was a gala time, for the parents were very glad to come hear 'Johnny or Georgie or Wardie' speak a piece and hear them choose up and spell down in the old, fashioned way; and they did learn to spell, if they learned nothing else.

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Mother was intent on having an old-fashioned wedding -- one as much like a southern wedding as was possible in this far western land. We were always thankful that we let her plan and manage every bit of it just as she wanted to, even to going with father to Sacramento forty miles away to buy my wedding dress, for it was the only wedding in her own family that she lived to see. That dress was a dream-- a very substantial one of white grosgrain silk. The skirt was puffed in back, full and trained to the requirements of that day. The waist, a basque we called it then, fitted like a glove and was trimmed with puffing of white silk illusion or tulle and satin pipings. Twenty yards went into the making of it. There was a long veil of tulle, a wreath of orange flowers and white kid gloves. Could any bride wish for more? I know it must have been quite a tax on father's purse and I would have been satisfied with a much simpler dress. But to mother it was her one bit of real elegance after many long years of toil and self-denial, and expression of the love of the dainty, beautiful things that are dear to most women's hearts even though they are big enough to go blithely on, garbed in the coarse and homely things that of necessity often fall to their lot. There was, too, a gray brocaded Japanese grenadine that was to be the second day's dress, to be worn to the informal dinner. In the South this dinner was always given by the family of the groom. As Philip had no people in California, Mr. Lowe, an old-time friend of the Savage family, was to give the dinner for us, and so we must prepare for it.

The wedding day was set for Wednesday June 4, 1873, and invitations were given to all the near neighbors, old and young, and the few dear friends of the family from Woodland and near there-- nearly one hundred guests in all. We had no caterers to depend upon and no maid in the kitchen, but there were good neighbors and a "China Boy" for dish washing and work of that kind. One neighbor sent two turkeys, another a dozen chickens, and for three days our house was a hive of industry. Dear Miss Alice Lange came to make all the cakes, or to superintend what she could not make. Mother attended to the baking of the meats, and who could do the better? First one woman and then another would come and help a while, and somehow out of much seeming confusion things began to take shape on Wednesday afternoon. An improvised table was

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laid in the long shed room, filling it from end to end, and the simple decorative touches of home grown flowers were placed upon it. The honeysuckle was in bloom, and its fragrance filled the whole house.

At three o'clock in the afternoon the guests from a distance began to arrive, and of course the bride disappeared. Soon the yard was full of happy and interesting people, for in the warm June days the shade of the trees was much more enticing than any house, and this was fortunate because our little home was very small to hold so many friends. Old friendships were renewed and new ones made, for it was not often that people living so far apart could meet, especially on such a joyous occasion. It was truly joyous, perhaps more for father's sake than for ours. He had traveled over the country many times in the performance of his duties of county superintendent, and had many friends both young and old who had come to rejoice with him. I do believe that while there was an undercurrent of sadness, as must of necessity always be with the passing away of old conditions, in their hearts my father and mother loved the man I was to marry and were proud and happy to receive him as a son, not only because I loved him but for his own sake as well.

I was very happy as I put on the beautiful dress and bent my head while mother and little Miss Ella Arnold, who were helping me, fastened the long veil with the orange blossoms. For a moment I stood waiting for the dear old minister, "Uncle Pende" (Pendagast) who had baptized me and was now to marry me, and for my Philip, who came for the last instructions. Then, side by side, with no wedding march or attendants, we walked out to the appointed place and turned and faced the minister. The solemnity of the step we were taking was upon us both, and so impressed us that for the moment all else was forgotten. The waiting people troubled us not at all, we gave our attention to the solemn words of the white-haired saintly man of God as he asked us to pledge ourselves to be faithful comrades through good and through ill, until death should us part. We answered him with all our hearts. At last we became conscious of the eager people as they crowded around us with their heartfelt congratulations. As dear mother took me in her arms, I whispered, "Did you cry, mother?" for she had told me she would stand back so no one would see her if she did. But she whispered back, 'No, you looked too happy'.

Soon the merry company surrounded the long table that was filled with the many good things the friends and loved ones had prepared. I cut wedding cake according to custom and gave my friends many pieces to take home and dream over. Then came the preparations for the departure of these who could go home, and those from the greatest distance were taken to their rooms; for somehow mother managed to find room for them, though it was a mystery to me then, a mystery that in after years was revealed to me as I wrestled with the problem of many friends and few rooms in my frontier life. Peace and calm rested over the erstwhile joyous scene.

We were all up early the next morning, and those who were to go to Mr. Lowe's for dinner got ready for the fifteen mile drive. Mr. John Goodnough, an elderly widower with whom in the old days I had held many a wordy tilt, for which my gentle mother reprimanded me quite severely, had so far forgiven me or had been won over by Philip that he offered his lovely top buggy for our use during the remainder of the week. We had good horses but only a light open single buggy, and for the long miles in the hot sun, the top buggy was much more comfortable. You see what a friendly little community we were, even though we did not have many of the present day conveniences..."

**I will stop here—having included many references to the locale and name-dropping a few other local pioneer names—not the least being the widower John Goodnough of Hungry Hollow, who apparently had hoped Flora would consider marrying him, but gallantly offered the newlyweds his bigger buggy for their Honeymoon trip. I have written much of this Goodnough family in earlier journals—as it was that family who dubbed the area north of the town of Capay *Hungry Hollow* and also made it a famous wheat-growing area in the late 1800s. When the draft comes out in book form I will be notifying my readers on our website: [greatercapayvalley.org](http://greatercapayvalley.org) and via our FaceBook page by the same name.**

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## ...and a River Runs Through it: *Cache Creek*

When asked where I am from or what I write about, I say Capay Valley... then have to explain it is a historic farming valley *with a river running through it* that we call Cache Creek—and often I then get, “Ah, the casino!” At which point I have to explain there was a river later called Cache Creek long before the casino made it world famous—and then they get an earful. Well, this is my last Newsletter or Journal before I add them to the 400-page book I already published and make it a 2-volume 600 pager, so I thought I would take a moment to share some facts I have come across about this little *crick* of ours.

Even though it has been dammed at 2 spots for many decades, at *flood* it can still move 40,000 cubic feet per second—now, that is a mighty river, no creek! Officially, it is an *antecedent stream*, which has existed from the earliest days of the uplift of the eastern side of the Coast Range. Like Putah Creek, it runs west to east, cutting through the north-to-south Blue Ridge, which pushed up between 1 million and 3 million years ago. Between Clear Lake and Capay Valley, the creek cuts a deep canyon through mountains that are still rising and shifting—which has always made it hard to tame, the steep slopes being so unstable there have been over 100 noted landslides mapped by the California Geological Survey.

Until the dams went in—the 2 biggest still existing since 1914 and the 1970s—and the farmers and cities diverted so much water and built protections against its floods, there was a healthy anadromous fishery migrating between the sea and Clear Lake. Much of this migration is stopped now, and the historic mining of gravel and mercury have tainted the waters so much people are warned against consuming certain fish and to limit consumption of others. But to this day, there are formerly trapped-to-near-extinction river otter and beaver making a rebound, and tracks of black bear and mountain lion can sometimes be seen near the banks. Eagles and hawks abound and all manner of water fowl. In addition, tule elk have been brought back after being hunted out, and a large herd can often be seen while hiking or driving up past Rumsey Canyon. Groups like Cache Creek Conservancy have been working to eradicate the invasive species of plants and to return many areas to their natural habitat, both for the sake of the wildlife and the natural control of flooding. As *mitigation* for having mined for gravel, gravel mining companies have plans drawn up to restore the mined areas as best they can back to public-use natural spaces, similar to the one in Capay near the Capay Bridge on County Road 85.

So, get out and see our *river*, take a hike, or shoot the world class rapids.

### Fun Fact regarding Cache Creek:

In addition to the numerous bridges I have written about along Cache Creek, some industrious farmers have run ferries and even built suspension bridges from the road side to the other side of the creek. One such adventure was undertaken by Shelford Wyatt to build a 400-foot suspension bridge of cable and 3-foot wide planks to reach both sides of his 700 acres ranch between the western and eastern slopes. One could see the galvanized steel cables stretched between two towers 267 feet apart, always swing in the slightest breeze, just 25 feet above low water level or 10 feet above flood level. Considered an engineering marvel, it was designed by Shelford's brother Jack, a state engineer, between Brooks and Guinda on County Road 72—and there was only one other like it, apparently, on the Salmon River further north. It cost him about \$6000, while a metal vehicle bridge would cost the county at that time at least \$300,000. Wyatt claimed suspension was the only logical solution to his problem: the creek bottom was too soft, all sandy gravel down at least 40 feet in depth, and would require a fortune in pilings. In addition to the cables and planks, he installed a handrail with hog wire attached to keep kids and the less nimble from plunging into the creek.

*The Greater Capay Valley Historical Society*

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NOTE: about time I got this done and in the mail, right?! A lot has happened to slow me down, but here it is—from my new digs in Sonoma County, where I have been enticed back and out of *retirement* due to a shortage of teachers. Yolo County will always be *home*—and I come back often—but this is my last Newsletter. I am now focused on getting these last 200+ pages added to the original 18-Journals/400-page book: *The History and Stories of the Capay Valley*. The hardcover books are sold out and 600-pages will be better accommodated as a 2-volume paperback set, so that is what I am aiming at. I had to go to Chicago to have the hardcover textbook-sized book produced, but Sacramento binders say they can handle my paperbacks—we will see! In any case, printer/binders demand money up front, so I am again pre-selling the books: as you are my loyal subscribers, I would like to offer you the opportunity to have a book set for the same price as your normal annual subscription: \$100. See the enclosed order form. Faithfully yours, *Betsy*

