

Yocha Dehe of Capay Valley

A brief history of the historic *Hill Patwin* people

by Elizabeth Monroe for The Greater Capay Valley Historical Society - January 2026



Historically referred to as the *Hill Patwin* people of the Capay Valley, with a history here of around 8000 years—or *forever*, depending on who you ask — the tribe prefers the more accurate *Yocha Dehe of the greater Wintun Nation*. This publication is a brief history and celebration of this historic people and their successes today. It is a series of excerpts from my book *The History and Stories of the Capay Valley*; and from their own on-line sharing; and from some other historic resources found at the Yolo County Archives, now *Shipley Walters Center for Yolo County Archives and Library Services* in Woodland, which acknowledges they “*are on traditional territory and homelands of the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation.*” Contact the Archives for an appointment via 530-666-8005. and yochadehe.gov and go to: yochadehe.org

Extracted from the book *The History and Stories of the Capay Valley* by Elizabeth Monroe--as an introduction to the Capay Valley and its people, especially the Hill Patwin.

Today: Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation



Duncan-Monroe home in Hungry Hollow in its prime; oil painting done by Jean Monroe from an early photo; home completed 1879.



*Top right photo:
Tom Monroe in
1950s Esparto
Beard Contest*



Tom J Monroe's brand is now featured with many others at the **Capay Road Trip Bar and Grill: T-lazy-J** is near the front entrance. The restored tavern has a rich history of its own, which will be explored herein at a later date. Tom took his 6AM coffee there most mornings with other farmers and ranchers before starting a long and labor-intensive work day running cattle and sheep on the *Monroe Ranch*--in his Duncan-Monroe family since the mid-1800s, initially as the *Duncan Ranch*.

I am also writing and collecting poetry and short stories of the area, some of which I will feature in this periodical. And, eventually, I hope to finish a novel which I have been working on for several decades, *The Ranch*, about my grandmother growing up north of Capay, over Cache Creek in the historic old Duncan home, built in 1879 and still standing regally to this day. [See it above as it looked when built]

Like any place, the Capay Valley's history is rich with viewpoints! To do research on the area and then turn that into stories of the place, it is important to include as many views and stories as possible, so it is my intent to make this an interactive forum for just that. So, please contact me at the email included on each page to offer your own stories and history—or to add to or correct anything I get wrong!

Since this was started so I could flesh out my own family stories, I will start with what I have--and also do honor to my too-soon departed father, *Hungry Hollow Cowboy* Tom J Monroe, who loved this place above all others:

November 14, 1918 -- February 2, 2003

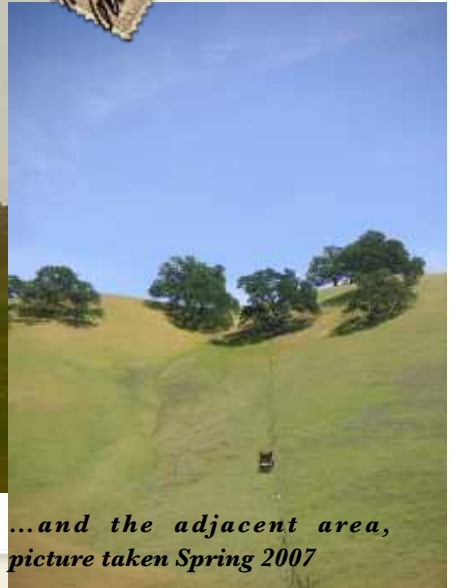
Dad

I shut my eyes
into my past.
Horses hooves running through the
back pasture,
Cows crying for lost calves.
Squirrels race across a dirt road.
The wind whispers to me on the bank
of the cottonwood creek.
The rumble of an old jeep,
a tall slim man,
with a blue-eyed dog making the bend.
Eyes well up at drifting back.
Why have I come here? What do I seek?
Hang my head to tears on
dirt-stained boots,
Thinking of precious lost roots.
Then through the dust he was gone,
Gone before I could say goodbye.

Tommy 2007



Turkey Camp on Duncan-Monroe Ranch: settled in 1850s; picture taken 1970s...



...and the adjacent area, picture taken Spring 2007

1840s In 1842 the Mexican government granted William Gordon two leagues of land (the *Guesisosi grant*) on both sides of Cache Creek from the current Madison area to about the current Fliers Club area. From there the *Rancho de Jesus Maria* reached to the Sacramento River. In 1846 the nine-league *Rancho Canada de Capay*, extending from the western edge of Gordon's grant through the north end of the Capay Valley, was granted to the three Berryessa brothers. Livestock production became the principal economic activity of rancheros and their followers.

1850s -- 1860s

In 1858 the land speculators Arnold and Gillig purchased 13,760 acres of the Berryessa grant and began to subdivide the land into parcels of 200 to 3800 acres. Gillig planted grain, grapevines, and fruit trees northwest of Langville (the present community of Capay) and established the county's first winery in 1860. Other speculators, Rhodes and Pratt, each took title to 6800 acres in the northern valley and began to sell parcels to settlers. Scattered ranches and tiny settlements developed along the primitive road leading to the quicksilver (mercury) mines in the canyon country to the west.

1870s

Livestock and grain farming were the mainstays of the region's developing agricultural economy, although several small vineyards and orchards offered promise. The Orleans Hill Winery in the Lamb Valley area southwest of Esparto gained recognition until disease destroyed its vineyards. Several small schools were established in the Capay Valley. After the Central Pacific Railroad established a line from Elmira in Solano County to Winters in Yolo County, five investors incorporated the Vaca Valley and Clear Lake Railroad in 1877, planning to extend the line north from Winters to Cache Creek and thence through the Capay Valley on to Clear Lake. Although financing for the line was not soon secured, the line was completed to the new town of Madison in 1877, where the railroad was to curve west toward the valley. Most of the village of Cottonwood to the south was moved to the new town, which became a center for grain shipping.

Today, those calling themselves "First Families" are proudly descended from pioneer settlers who now claim 4-7 generations in the Greater Capay Valley.

But while they generally shared the area peacefully with the indigenous Patwin/Wintun tribe since the early to mid-1800s, they certainly were not "first" families in the area. A long and rich history of the native people is being done--some of which will be covered herein and over the next volumes.

1880s

In 1887 several San Francisco investors incorporated the Capay Valley Land Company, composed chiefly of officers of the Southern Pacific Railroad. The company planned to divide several large land holdings into 10- to 40-acre parcels for fruit farming and to establish town sites along the length of the coming railroad. That same year local farmers formed the Rumsey Ditch Association to build and operate an eight-mile irrigation canal (later shortened) from Cache Creek above Rumsey to the vicinity of Guinda. In 1888 the new town of Esperanza (renamed Esparto after a native bunch grass in 1890) was laid out, and railroad track was laid up to Rumsey (named for a local landowner) at the north end of the valley, with the first passenger train running in July. At the terminus of the railroad were railroad sidings, a manually operated turntable, a section house, and a 23-room hotel. Guinda had a house for the section supervisor and a bunkhouse for workers. In 1889 a three-story hotel was completed in Esparto, featuring gas lights, a pressurized water system, and electric bells. (The hotel was damaged in the 1892 earthquake but repaired; after a succession of ownerships, the building was torn down in 1935.) Postmasters were appointed at Guinda (the Spanish word for the wild cherry tree), and Rumsey, and Langville was renamed Capay.

1890s

The Guinda store (seen above right) was built in 1891, the Guinda Hotel in 1893 (torn down in the 1990s). Both were busy and successful during their early years, and the Guinda Hotel supported a popular bar until the 1950s. A substantial two-story elementary school building was erected at Guinda.

Fruit packing sheds began to operate in Guinda and Rumsey, making daily seasonal deliveries to two trains with ice cars. Other land company plans were short-lived. A community four miles west of

Guinda business district seen in 1973: Hotel, Store and Post Office



Capay called Cadenasso (after local landowners) never really developed, and six miles to the north a colony near Tancred (named for a hero of the First Crusade) lasted only until a hard frost killed many of the young fruit trees in 1896 and the colony went bankrupt. Tancred had a post office from 1892 until 1932 but never became a functioning town. In 1893 Yolo County's second high school was established in Esparto. In the early 1890s a single-wire grounded telephone line between Guinda and Rumsey was laid and a phone placed in a store in each town, to be used by the public when the stores were open.

The Century Turns: 1900s

In 1900 the population of the Capay Valley was recorded at 1,381. Rumsey residents built a hall for a local women's group about 1903, and Guinda built a community hall in 1909 (now the Western Yolo Grange Hall). The small band of local Wintun Indians was relocated from its old village site northeast of Rumsey to a federally purchased rancheria on the other side of the valley. Later, in 1942, some of the band moved to a new site near Brooks, while others moved to Colusa County. Plans to extend the railroad through the Rumsey canyon were abandoned.

History and photo courtesy of Douglas G. Nareau



A Multi-cultural Valley with a History of Integrated Schools, Inclusive Attitudes--and Several Thousand Years of Tribal Habitation.

While it is never without conflict when one group's existence in an area is interrupted by another's, it is unique for the cultures to somehow find a way to co-exist to the point they did--and do--in the Capay Valley. The local indigenous people of the Wintun Tribe have a rich history in the area of several thousand years—that is only now being fully explored by the tribe—and I can't presume to tell it. But I would also not ignore it in favor of my own ancestors' history, here—beginning in the 1850s, I am aware we were the *invaders*.

Needless to say, when the colonial-minded Spanish and Mexicans claimed the land for themselves, and then granted it to others who sold it to American settlers—all *invaders*—they brought with them the well-known diseases and disruptions that led to loss of life and much of the culture and the traditional livelihood. The conflicts between the expanding US and the Mexican government led to more disruption to the culture as it was adapting—closely followed by a flood of American and European settlers. There is a wealth of information of this more current activity, but I will try to give an overview from several source documents—filling in more history on the earlier period as that becomes available. But for now, here is what we know: by the mid-to-late-1800s, the different cultures had begun to settle in together and build farms and ranches, towns and schools--and to intermarry and send their kids to integrated schools. A unique situation that became a long tradition in the area.

First, an overview of California Indians:

Source: *The Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico*, Frederick Webb Hodge. 1906, Bureau of American Ethnology,

Government Printing Office. NOTE: Many of the opinions herein stated have been disproved in recent years.

At the time, the document stated: "The Indians of California are among the least known groups of natives of North America." This is a robustly non-native perspective, obviously—they were only unknown to the *invaders*, but well known throughout the area by other tribes.

"Those along the coast south of San Francisco were brought under Spanish missionary influence in the latter part of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries. Some tribes, however, were not known [to outsiders] even by name until after the discovery of gold and the settlement of the country in 1849 and subsequently." While this document states that "The Californians were among the least warlike tribes of the continent and offered but little resistance, and that always ineffectual, to the seizure of their territory by the whites," there are documented battles against white settlers and Mexican forces in available archives. They obviously struggled to maintain their lands under various occupying groups.

"Comparatively few of them ever lived on reservations. The majority lived as *squatters* on the land of white owners or of the Government, or in some cases on land allotted them by the government or even bought by themselves from white *owners*." The people still lived, and continued to live as close to their ancestral villages as they could, no matter the ownership.



Geological wonders high above the Capay Valley

Scientists all over California study and marvel at the many wonders of this area. One such is the apparent creek bed miles above the Valley at Cortina Bluff. The hot waters from the area called Wilbur Springs at the upper end of the valley have a unique sheath bacteria not found anywhere else.



Seen above: Guinda area "Indian School" for adult vocational training was above Guinda to the west. All photos taken 1973 by Douglas Nareau

"Their number has decreased very rapidly and" by 1930s about 15,000 survived "as compared with perhaps 150,000 before the arrival of the whites." The exact numbers in the Capay Valley are not yet known for certain.

While this document goes on to say, "The native population of California was broken up into a great number of small groups...often somewhat unsettled in habitation..." this view is today highly disputed, claiming that they were among the most settled people anywhere, living in harmony and balance with their environment for thousands of years... "within very limited territories, and were never nomadic," according to the tribe.

"The dialects of almost all of these groups were different and belonged to as many as 21 distinct linguistic families, being a fourth of the total number found in all North America, and, as compared with the area of the state, so large that California must probably be regarded as the region of the greatest aboriginal

linguistic diversity in the world." Of course we now know that other groups such as those in Papua New Guinea join American aboriginals in being a source of original languages and culture.

The 1906 Handbook goes on to say: "The groups in which they live are very loose, being defined and held together by language and the topography of the country much more than by any political or social organization; distinct tribes, as they occur in many other parts of America, do not really exist. The small village is the most common unit of organization among these people." Today we know there was a lot of trade, and on the border lands people spoke several languages.

"Houses were often of grass, tule, or brush, or of bark, sometimes covered with earth...over the greater part of the state a raft of tules was the only means of navigation" though log boats were used in the south. "Agriculture was nowhere practiced..." is a much disputed opinion

Old Rumsey School

Above, Rumsey School -- seen 1973 --still stands today, as a private home.

Valley area schools were generally integrated; attendance was more driven by locale: generally a 4 mile walk from home. Photo groupings of students bear this out throughout the area: students of all races and "classes," stood together as friends and neighbors--just as they do in this area today. Following the 4-mile rule, the valley towns--and schools--are approximately 7-8 miles apart.

today; according to a tribal source: *crop tending was practiced all over the area. In fact, land management was done in an intensive way in most areas. Wild crops were maintained so they multiplied and provided rich gathering grounds for Tribes and individual families.* This was certainly the case in the Capay Valley. Deer and small game were hunted, and there was considerable fishing; but the bulk of the food was vegetation. The main reliance was placed on numerous varieties of acorns, and next to these, on seeds, especially of grasses and herbs. Roots and berries were less used.

Below: Capay Valley from Cortina Bluff, or Rumsey Grade




“The mythology of the Californians was characterized by unusually well-developed creation myths...Their ceremonies were numerous and elaborate as compared with the prevailing simplicity of life...One set of ceremonies was usually connected with a secret religious society; another, often spectacular, was held in remembrance of the dead.”

Of course we know very little about the cultural ceremonies of the Patwin and are only now learning what they themselves would say about the history that was written about them by others. In my effort to learn more, I also went to ***Search for your Ancestors*** on [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) and found this about our local Capay Valley tribe:

Patwin, signifies "person" in their own language. The Patwin formed the southernmost and most diverse dialectic division of the former Wintun (or Copehan) linguistic family, now considered part of the Penutian stock. Location: On the western side of Sacramento Valley, and extending from San Francisco Bay to a point a little south of Willows, occupying both sides of Sacramento River from a few miles above its junction with Feather River to the northern boundaries of their territory.

Subdivisions, or "Tribelets," and Villages (As given by Kroeber 1932): Pertaining to Capay Valley Hill Patwin, from south to north: South of Cache Creek, tribelets were known by their villages: Suskol, Tuluka, Ulato, Topai-dihi, and Liwai-to, for instance. Moso was the tribe nearest the current town of Capay. Of note, per CH Mirriam in 1929: “Kopā’ (Kope), were in the broad fiat part of Capay Valley near Brooks; and in 1932 Kroeber has Hacha 3 miles below Capay. Kisi, a village upstream on Cache Creek, may have been a tribal center. Significantly, Imil, a village apparently in a tribal territory near Guinda, was recently reclaimed by the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation as one of their properties; and Sūya, a village half a mile north of Guinda; as well as 16 additional inhabited sites. Today, a tribal school in the Capay Valley is endeavoring to keep the history, language and culture alive.

In Cortina Valley, a Wintun-Patwin Indian Rancheria in the late 1800s, there were wooden as well as tule-thatched structures. Patwin villages were all along Cache Creek in the Capay Valley and beyond. The valley floor, now Highway 16, and other roads formed a busy trade route for thousands of years.



RANCHO CANADA DE CAPAY: TO UNDERSTAND THE PIONEER SETTLEMENT OF THE AREA, IT IS IMPORTANT TO GO BACK TO THIS 1846 MEXICAN LAND GRANT

Once again, history is all about viewpoints. In the view of the settlers, this area was ripe for the plucking in the mid-1800s. To the Mexicans who still claimed this as part of Alta California, the land grants of many thousands of acres to single owners was a way to control it for Mexico. To the Wintun tribe, it was a place they called home for over 8000 years and that was being invaded and taken from them.

Ada Merhoff tells it one way in her *Capay Valley, The Land & The People 1846-1900*; while Eftimeos Salonites tells a somewhat different tale in his *Berreyesa, The Rape of The Mexican Land Grant Rancho Canada de Capay*; and the Wintun tribe would have a very different tale of invaders and colonialists--raping the land in their own ways, destroying a culture in the process.

But the facts of the land grant and the US claim to California that followed shortly thereafter are pretty much the same; historical facts pulled from several sources:

In 1846 Mexican governor Pio Pico of Alta California granted nine square leagues--over 40,000 square

acres--to three Berryessa [today's accepted spelling] brothers, and included the whole Capay Valley, originally called Canyon of the Rio de Jesus Maria and later Cache Creek Canyon. According to Mexican law, they presented their petition along with a "diseno," or detailed map of the entire area. "The Act of Jurisdiccional Possession" was how Californians then established boundaries to their land.

According to Ada Merhoff's book, in 1847 the Berryessas sold 7.5 leagues to Jasper O'Farrell for \$3000. In 1849 the remaining 1.5 leagues of the original nine-league grant were "given" to Jacob Hoppe by separate agreement with the Berryessas. According to other sources, the Berryessa brothers were falsely jailed, at which time O'Farrell took the land, later paying to make it a "legal" transaction.

In 1846 the US Navy seized Mexican military outposts in California, declaring it American territory, leading to the July 1848 Treaty of Peace signed in Guadalupe Hidalgo, Mexico, where the US paid Mexico \$15 million for an area that contained Texas, New Mexico, and Alta California, comprised of California, Nevada, Arizona and parts of Colorado and Wyoming.

Title to all grants made prior to July 1846 were subject to US review. The Gwin Act of 1851 was an attempt to make Mexican land grants available to the public, ignoring a major provision of the Hidalgo Treaty. American settlers wanted access to these lands just as they had in other parts of the US--

leading to many years of land and boundary disputes--which in some cases continue today as old, early ranches are sold and title searches uncover controversy and even squatters' rights claims.

The subject is covered in much detail in many sources, including the two cited here, but the focus in these journal volumes I am writing will be on the early ranches and farms begun on these lands beginning in the late 1840s through today. Many of the earlier settlers' families still live and farm or ranch in the area, while others have sold to the original inhabitants--the tribal descendants--or to "newcomers" arriving in the last 50 years or later. The revitalization of this unique area is the work and cooperation among all these groups, so that is my focus.

Future volumes will cover the current occupation and uses of the area and the efforts to keep it unique and special--while revitalizing it and changing with the times as needs be.

While Eftimeos Salonites felt that the "true pioneers of the valley" were the "vaqueros and the Indians of the canada," his final claim on this subject would hold true for all the pioneers who have settled here since: "They all regarded and shared the valley with dignity. They might well have said, with understandable pride... 'This land is our land!'"

Rancherias [Tribal *Reservations*], Ranchos [Mexican], and Ranches [Euro-settlers] —in early California and western Yolo County

While the well-known story of Spanish explorers and their missions moving into Alta California--after first colonizing Mexico and Baja California--was playing itself out, to a lesser degree its effects were felt what would become Yolo County in northern California and in the western part of the county, in the Capay Valley. Our focus is on this valley and its native population of Hill Patwin with its history in the valley of thousands of years. A more in-depth study of how the arrival of Europeans played itself out here has been done by others and/or is in the process by still others, but an overview is necessary, here, to help tell the story of how settlers came to this special place and its effect on the native population.

Spain sent explorers to Alta California as far as the Santa Barbara area as early as 1542, but they did not show serious interest in colonizing and populating this northern area until the 1760s. Military forts, or presidios, were established as Franciscan Friar Junipero Serra began the mission system in 1769. Small towns, or pueblos, sprang up in association with the forts and missions and began trying to attract settlers with land grants. The missions set about converting the native population to Christianity and getting them to give up their culture in favor of one more European; after these “neophytes” were “educated” at the missions, many were sent to live in the pueblos or to **rancherias** sponsored by the mission system. A **rancheria** is just another way to say *reservation*—which is a Euro-term used interchangeably by the US government for trying to corral and control the native populations: by giving them a section of their former lands and financial support, etc., the government agreed to their *sovereignty* as a nation separate from the U.S.

The approximately 300,000 California natives were considered much less agricultural or warlike than many tribes to the east due to many factors, primarily the topography and climate. They “managed” the environment more than *farmed* it, using acorns and natural roots and grasses, giving them the now-derogatory nickname “Digger Indians” by the early outsiders who became acquainted with them. The Capay Valley native population was similar in their customs and culture, though not a great deal has been published about them as a group. By 1845 it is estimated that the native population of Alta California was half what it was when the Spanish had arrived; no doubt a similar reduction occurred in the Capay Valley as well, though the presence of Spanish colonizers was never to a great extent here.

The Spanish established far fewer land grants than did the Mexicans, who had won their independence in 1821. Much more comfortable doing business with *foreigners*, such as trappers, traders, sailors and merchants, the Mexican government attempted to settle the area by issuing huge tracts of land to individual landlords, not unlike the European feudal system. The present native population was meant to be left to use the land “unmolested” in an attempt to keep the peace and continue to increase the settlement claims on the land. Foreigners were able to apply for grants if they first converted to Catholicism and married one of the Mexican nationals or Californios. Governors were encouraged to issue land grants, which became **ranchos** of many leagues. With these **ranchos**, the raising and marketing of beef and hides became important commerce.

By the time adventuresome trapper Jedediah Smith came overland in 1826, a pattern was already established that opened a floodgate of interest that would so challenge the Mexican hold on the land that it would end with a war and the US taking possession of Alta California 1847. But even that was nothing to the changes that a gold discovery in 1848

would bring. In the following year alone, about 100,000 new people came to California. The importance of wheat and cattle exploded as the hungry population grew. And California was perfect for it: dry most of the year with large expanses of natural grass lands that led to dry farming, while the rolling hills also led to natural cattle grazing. It wasn't long before many of those 100,000 newcomers figured out that there was more money to be made feeding the masses than there was to be pulled from the creeks in gold. While two of the most powerful forces in that regard are Hugh Glenn, the *wheat king*, and Henry Miller, the *cattle king*, many others found their way to large tracts of land to make their wealth and to start California dynasties of their own—many here in the greater Capay Valley area. Instead of hundreds of thousands of acres that made up the Mexican Land Grants and **Ranchos**, new Euro-settlers bought up pieces of these huge land grants as they became available, and farmed or ranched smaller parcels; called farms if they were primarily crops or **ranches** if they included livestock—which many did, as a settler had to provide for all of his own needs--that could be a few acres up to a few thousand acres in the lush valley and the flats and rolling hill areas surrounding it. In addition to wheat and cattle, the fertile Capay Valley, with its natural watershed into a river that was dubbed Cache Creek, proved also suited to orchards and vineyards.

The Sacramento Valley in the mid-1800s included a triangular flood plain between the two rivers they called *creeks*--Putah Creek to the south and Cache Creek to the north—and the much larger Sacramento River to the East. The area was marsh and swamp much of the year, and as Euro-settlers tried to farm and ranch it, regular flooding wiped out crops and homesteads and drowned livestock so often they finally settled on *reclamation* with a series of ditches and reservoirs and dams. The native tribes had learned to live with the annual flooding, knowing that it was necessary to replenish the fertile soils, but the new settlers had a different culture of agriculture they brought with them from the East and from Europe, which led them to drain the swamps and try to control the raging waters and clear the native oak forests and would lead to a need for added fertilizers and chemicals, etc. Today, farmers are learning that some of the cultural wisdom of the native tribes regarding sustainable farming and controlled burns is worth trying. And even the riparian forests and naïve plants are useful and being replenished.

Which brings us to the Capay Valley and the historic native Hill Patwin tribe—now referred to as the Yocha Dehe of the larger Wintun Nation. They had historically avoided settling on the flood plains, instead farming and fishing them seasonally, but settling on higher ground, nurturing the native oaks and plants. Today, the fertile valley with *a river running through it*—Cache Creek--is home to many organic and sustainable farms and ranches, some 5-7th generation descendants of Euro-pioneers and some more recent arrivals of 1-50 years; and the tribe has bought back many thousands of their original homelands with proceeds from a casino in Brooks on land of their final **rancheria**; and have returned to sustainable farming; built an olive oil mill/press in Brooks to accommodate their own extensive olive farms and those of their neighbors; and have a cultural school to nurture their customs and language; and a powerful tribal council, intent on *being good neighbors* with the valley residents and the whole county of Yolo—and beyond.

In the following pages I have inserted a page of a 1931 interview with one of my ancestral relatives in the Capay Valley including his memory of the Hill Patwin tribal use of the ranch of his father and my great grandfather, the Duncan brothers who began buying parcels north and west of Capay in the mid 1800s; and three pages I published in 2015 including excerpts from and website links for the tribe's own research and history. In Frank Duncan's memory, the tribe continued to use the Duncan Ranch lands around one of their important historic villages—the general location of which has been identified by anthropologists and archeologists, north of the town of Capay.



Stewart Indian School

In doing research on our Capay Valley Hill Patwin tribe, I was led to the Stewart Indian School in the Carson Valley of Nevada, where our valley's native children were sent to a "boarding school" to teach them English and useful trades—and to "Americanize" them, stripping them of their native culture in the process. Interestingly, several former students have oral narratives on site that claims they did not have a negative experience during their time there; they were living in "abject poverty" and had no access to an education, so this was overall a positive experience for some. Of course, these

conditions were a result of the encroachment of Euro-American pioneers to the Capay Valley—as with many other parts of America-- and the Federal Government's attempts to pave the way for American settlers. Interestingly, this Indian School had a change of direction in the 1930s that led to their native cultures and languages and history being studied and celebrated. So, nothing is simple, of course, there are always different viewpoints—even among those who had no choice in the experience. From the invitation to the event we get this verbiage: "The stories of alumni, former students and staff will be memorialized as the historic Stewart Indian School campus finds new life through preservation. Beginning in 1890, Stewart Indian School was a federally operated boarding school at which Native American children, as young as 4-years-old, were forcefully taken from their communities in order to assimilate the first people of the Great Basin into mainstream society. Following a military school model, students' hair was cut, uniforms were required, and the students were forbidden to speak their languages or practice their traditions, while they were taught English and learned trades and domestic skills in attempt to eliminate Native American culture." Even so, many native people also took this opportunity to give their children an education and hopes for a "better life." This particular site became a very popular and sought-after boarding school among tribal people.

I was able to attend a soft opening of the new **Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum at 5500 Snyder Avenue in Carson City, NV**, and to hear stories of alumni in December 2019, as a guest of Adrienne Monroe, who works for the Nevada Department of Corrections which leases space from the Nevada Indian Commission. The official grand opening and dedication will be in May 2020.

I was able to meet the Curator of the new museum and was invited back to do research in March on our own Capay Valley students who attended. My hope is to locate some who are still living in the area to interview them about their own experience of this time and place.

At right: Adrienne [Mrs. Jeff Monroe of Yolo County] now works for the Department of Corrections in Nevada and was able to get us a special invitation to the soft opening of the Stewart School, which shares the campus with her employer. Here, she talks to historian Douglas Nareau about the history of the place, including the special stone masonry seen here; the buildings were built by students learning this important art/trade from Native stone masons.



From an *Interview with Irenia*, an elder Pomo from the Nice-Lakeport area in Lake County in 1999 by Jim Barilla, I was able to pull some information about such a boarding school experience—as well as some other interesting memories of cultural norms similar to our own Hill Patwin:

About the experience with the *Indian Schools* she recalls: “They sent the Indian kids to boarding school. My mom was at a school down in Riverside until she was a teenager. She came home in the summers, but at school they didn’t allow the kids to speak their language. Every time my mom would say an Indian word she’d get reprimanded for it. So she slowly lost her language. She remembers some words, but, through no fault of hers, she lost most of it. That’s what the school was designed for—assimilation. Now we’re starting a language program...” About the term “Rancheria” she shared: “Rancheria comes from the Spanish and it means just the same thing as a reservation, but they gave the name rancheria to land bases that were less than forty acres. When you hear rancheria it means it’s a really small, mini reservation.” About the use of tule she shared: “We make demonstration tule boats and houses. We use a tule to tie around the bundles and we carry them out. It takes a lot of tules to make something. You wonder how those poor women gathered them! They’re heavy and they’re awkward and you’re walking in that wetland and you get very muddy and the water is up to your knees. You reach down to cut the tules, and you don’t know what you’re going to be touching down there.” About the acorn grinding mortars—colloquially, ‘Indian Grinding Rocks’—she shared: “The Indians used it for grinding acorns. When the acorns fall off the tree, just about now, they collect them. They season them for a while until they get dried out, and then they just crack them. They grind them until they get a fine powder; and then they leach it. They cover it over and over with water until it changes color. It turns into a paste, but they have to leach it over and over to get the toxins out. That’s when it turns a different color and it’s ready. And then they eat it.

Here we use it as a mush, but you can also make it into bread. It’s a taste you have to acquire. It’s one of those things, like greens; you feel good when you eat the fiber—lots of fiber. It’s a little bit bitter—like a grain, maybe like bran. It looks like Cream of Wheat—but it doesn’t taste that good! But it’s very rich and full of vitamins. You eat it enough and it starts to taste good. We make it on big occasions and we eat seaweed along with it that we gather from the ocean.

There’s not that many natural foods left that the tribes used to eat. The acorns are pretty much the last of them. In the history books of California Indians they always call the eastern Pomo ‘berry and nut gatherers’. I always get a laugh out of that! We like to pick berries and we like to eat nuts, but that’s not all we like to do!”

This last quote reminds me of a conversation I had a few years back with the tribal historian in Capay Valley who let me know that the term “Digger Indian” that was so commonly used by early historians and anthropologists is a derogatory term based on these very uninformed observations: to the eyes of Euro-pioneers and historians, the local tribes did not “farm,” but *dug and gleaned*—which to one culture was a complex form of agriculture, but to another was a lazy way to survive off the land. We are only recently coming to understand and appreciate this form of sustainable *agriculture*—and the practice of controlled burns! It would appear we have a lot to learn about the complex wisdom of the tribes who lived in this area thousands of years before the Euro-pioneers arrived.

22-year-old Wyatt Godfrey Duncan and his 12-year-old brother Bill crossed the plains in 1850 working a cattle drive for Doc Lane—and for gold. They would begin buying parcels of the Rancho Canada de Capay Land Grant soon after, and would amass about 8000 acres with 4 later-arriving siblings, including Ben Franklin Duncan. Many Capay area settlers are related to one another through this family, and fortunately the local newspapers saw fit to interview several Duncans about their early lives in Capay Valley and Hungry Hollow. Frank Duncan's interview went on for several useful pages, but this portion is of interest for his recollections of the Hill Patwin tribe on what was their historic lands and was now part of the Duncan Ranch just north of the town of Capay—including the *Duncan Grove*, an important extant Oak forest.

July, 1931

Frank Duncan

" I was born on the old Duncan place north of Capay—the old cabin where I first saw the light of day is still standing there. My father, W. H. Duncan, and my uncle, W. G. Duncan, were among the very early settlers here. Bill Gordon, the first white settler, was already here and a few others. The original Gordon place was built just north of what is now Moore's Dam, on what was later the Gordon Grant. Gordon and his family are buried under an oak tree there and their graves may still be seen just a little ways north of Moore's Dam. The Duncans settled first in the vicinity of where the Madison Bridge now stands, and some of them are buried in the old burial ground on the Archer place, which was the old Doc. Lane place. Doc. Lane is also buried there.

One of my earliest recollections is seeing the great string of Indians passing through, as they came from over in Berryessa, where they had a big rancheria. There was another rancheria in our pasture, back of the house about 300 yards. The Indians stopped over there on their trip to Grimes, where there was still another of their rancherias. They always came through in the fall, great droves of them. After the threshing was done, for that was before the days of harvesters, the Indians went around from ranch to ranch and cleaned the stackbottoms for half of the grain there. The half belonging to the ranchers they merely hauled to chickenyards or barnyards, but their half they always took to the creek and washed, washing away all chaff and dirt, and then drying the wheat in the sun, to be used for grinding for their food later on.

Also at that time of year the creek was always low and the

Spring Time
in the Capay
Valley!
March-May
2015



**BROOKS FAMILIES
RUSSELL AND SMITH,
ET AL**



**BASEBALL IN THE
VALLEY**



**Patwin - Wintun
History in the Capay
Valley**

TGCVHS NEWSLETTER

Capay-to-Brooks area on Official 1908 Yolo County Map



As the Patwin tribe of Native Americans of Capay Valley—now legally known as Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation—are doing their own history, they do not

need me to tell their story for them, but I am determined to at least honor their existence of thousands of years along Cache Creek before the Euro-pioneers arrived—including my own Scots ancestors. When I asked their historian for information, he directed me to their websites and invited me to borrow whatever I wanted from them. Most of what I had published when I started this research four years ago came from ancient—and often now-discredited—historical texts on the people who would tell you they were here “from the beginning of time.” Part of the nationally recognized Wintun Nation, the Hill Patwin of our valley were greatly decimated by contact with “others,” just as were all Native People across this land. Their story was left out of our textbooks—just as were the atrocities committed against Blacks, Japanese, Chinese and others—until the 1970s when they began to get their due in our school curriculum. But even beyond what is in the textbooks now, the Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation of Capay Valley has its own history arm compiling information, resources and stories: For more information visit: <http://yochadehe.org/cultural-°-resources/living-°-culture-°-preservation/historic-°-archives> — excerpts follow:

By amassing the largest collection of Patwin historic archives, we are able to understand our past and make informed decisions for the future. Our collections include written documents, historic video and audio files, and a collection of 12,000 current and historic images. Sources for these files include federal government archives, as well as linguistic and ethnographic field notes housed in a variety of universities from Berkeley to Harvard. Family collections, oral histories, and newspaper articles provide primary documentation to ensure our stories are authentic.

The Patwin historic archive is used in a variety of ways to support the work of government affairs, educational engagements, site protection, and internal programs. Through primary materials, we are able to engage multiple generations in our educational and cultural experiences.

Also check out: <http://yochadehe.org/heritage/history> — excerpts follow:

For thousands of years, members of California’s Wintun Tribes have been guided by a culture rich with an understanding of medicine, technology, food production and land stewardship. The towns and roads of today were the villages and trade routes of our past. Our land was healthy and our early communities thrived.

The arrival of missionaries and European explorers forever altered the course of Native people in California. Many Wintun people were enslaved to serve the missions, while abuse and disease further dwindled our numbers. By the 1800s, many of our ancestors were purged of their home and hunting lands by opportunists driven by gold and greed. Northern California Native people were decimated by the Gold Rush and federal policies that legalized genocide. During this time the Yocha Dehe population declined dramatically and our ancestors were rendered nearly extinct.

In the early 1900s, our Tribe was forcibly removed from our village by the US government and placed on a federally created rancheria—otherwise known as a reservation—in Rumsey, California. Stranded on barren non-irrigateable land, they struggled to survive. In 1940, our people gained a hard-won relocation to a small parcel of land further south in the Capay Valley, where they managed to cultivate small amounts of food. Without the opportunity to produce more than subsistence levels of crops, our ancestors who had lived sustainably for thousands of years, became dependent on the

When it was recommended that we should look for influential local historical figures to honor by naming features like bridges, parks or roads after them—and by creating informative plaques to educate and celebrate them as a part of our heritage—Mabel McKay was immediately suggested by Rumsey locals. I thought it would be a good idea to get to *know* Mabel McKay—since she is part of our storied history in the Capay Valley. The various tribes from Clear Lake down the Cache Creek to north of Woodland and south to Putah Creek, and throughout Solano County, the *Pomo* and *Patwin*, have had a history in this area for thousands of years—and Mabel was one of our essential links to this history. Known and celebrated for her basket weaving and cultural and language knowledge, you can even learn about her at the **Smithsonian**, but also at our own **California Museum in Sacramento**: “The **Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation** is a federally recognized tribe of Wintun people, specifically Patwin people or southern Wintun, in Yolo County, California. They were formerly known as the **Rumsey Indian Rancheria of Wintun Indians of California**.” So, while Mabel is of the **Pomo** in Clear Lake area, she is also of Patwin descent and an important part of our Cache Creek/Capay Valley history—and an important historical character—so some feel she’s an appropriate candidate for the naming of a bridge in **Rumsey** over the Cache Creek.

Mabel McKay (1907-1993), according to the California Museum: “was a member of the *Long Valley Cache Creek Pomo* tribe,” but was of Patwin decent, “born in Nice, California. Mabel McKay was one of the greatest California basket weavers of all time, as well as a traditional healer, teacher of Pomo traditions and the last speaker of her language.

Born in rural Northern California, McKay was raised by her maternal grandmother, also a basket weaver, who taught her the *Long Valley Cache Creek* language and how to gather traditional medicinal plants. In Pomo culture, certain people are guided by the Spirit through dreams. McKay was one of these people, and the dreams instructed her in creating baskets. She wove her first basket at age eight and soon gained recognition for her fine weaving, appearing in newspaper articles and giving demonstrations at the **State Indian Museum** in Sacramento. Later, she taught and demonstrated basketry across the country to both Native and non-Native students. She didn’t sell her baskets, instead making them as gifts and as objects of healing. With their tight stitches, perfect spacing, and fine quality materials, today they are prized by collectors and are in many museums, including the **Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of Natural History**.

The Spirit also guided McKay in her traditional medicine practices. Widely respected as a healer, she was the last of the Pomo *dream doctors*, and traveled long distances to visit patients, both inside and outside her Native community.

McKay was always a strong advocate for her culture and for the environment, especially as development and dams destroyed areas that had been traditional gathering places for sedge and other basket materials. In 1976 Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr. appointed her to California’s first Native American Heritage Commission, on which she served for many years. There, long before legislation existed to protect Indian cultural resources, she was a powerful voice for the proper handling of sacred objects and burial sites.”

She was a founding member of **California Native American Heritage Commission**

Checkout:

1) this book I just ordered:

**Mabel McKay: Weaving the Dream (Portraits of American Genius) by Greg Sarris (1997)*

[https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B01MZ3QQ9I/ref=ppx_yo_dt_b_asin_title_ooo_soo?](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B01MZ3QQ9I/ref=ppx_yo_dt_b_asin_title_ooo_soo?ie=UTF8&psc=1)
[ie=UTF8&psc=1](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B01MZ3QQ9I/ref=ppx_yo_dt_b_asin_title_ooo_soo?ie=UTF8&psc=1)

2) Official website: yochadehe.org

From the official website yochadehe.org you will find:

“For thousands of years, members of California’s Wintun Tribes have been guided by a culture rich with an understanding of medicine, technology, food production and land stewardship. The towns and roads of today were the villages and trade routes of our past. Our land was healthy and our early communities thrived.

The arrival of missionaries and European explorers forever altered the course of Native people in California. By the 1800s, many of our ancestors were purged of their home and hunting lands by opportunists driven by gold and greed. Northern California Native people were decimated by the Gold Rush and federal policies that legalized genocide. During this time the Yocha Dehe population declined dramatically and our ancestors were rendered nearly extinct.

In the early 1900s, our Tribe was forcibly removed from our village by the US government and placed on a federally created **rancheria**—otherwise known as a **reservation**—in **Rumsey**, California. [visit this site: <https://calisphere.org/item/ark:/13030/tf067nb3vg/>] on barren, non-irrigatable land, they struggled to survive. In 1940, our people gained a hard-won relocation to a small parcel of land further south in the Capay Valley, [near Brooks] where they managed to cultivate small amounts of food. Without the opportunity to produce more than subsistence levels of crops, our ancestors, who had lived sustainably for thousands of years, became dependent on the US government for survival. [see timeline posted below; found at the **Cache Creek Nature Preserve/Conservancy**]

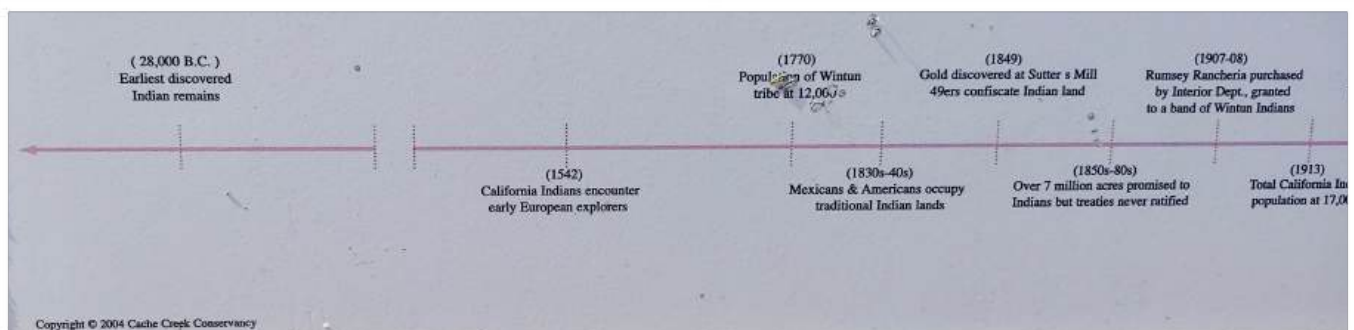
Finally, in the late 1980s, the tide began to turn. Some ancestral lands were restored to our Tribe, providing a land base for housing and economic development. It was at this time that the State of California instituted the California Lottery and the federal government enacted the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA). The United States Congress enactment of IGRA in particular provided a means to promote economic development and self-sufficiency with the explicit purpose of strengthening tribal self-governance. This offered the Tribe the opportunity to open **Cache Creek Indian Bingo** on part of our 188 acres of trust land.

We focused our resources on building the necessary foundation for our tribal government to manage assets generated by the bingo hall. Powered by hard work and determination, we developed our own management strategy and **expanded the bingo hall into the world-class *Cache Creek Casino Resort***, eventually providing economic development and stability for our tribal members.

The independence gained from the initial influx of gaming revenue gave the Tribe the wherewithal to **reacquire some of our traditional lands**, to invest in the future of our children through improved education and to provide philanthropic support for communities in need.

In 2009, the Tribe legally changed our name from the **Rumsey Band of Wintun Indians**, as we were originally labeled by the federal government, to **Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation**, named for our homeland in our ancestral Patwin language. The name change represents an important mark in time for the people of Yocha Dehe. It connects our Tribe to our heritage and expresses our sense of pride and hope for the future.”

But it is also enjoyable to learn about the Yocha Dehe history while strolling around the **Nature Preserves** and **Open Space Parks**, such as the **Cache Creek Nature Preserve/Conservancy** at 34199 Co Rd 20, Woodland, CA 95695 (530) 661-1070 — check ahead during this Pandemic, as access and hours have altered: see below & next page for some photos of the informational boards you will find there; cachecreekconservancy.org



Mabel McKay was of the Pomo tribe of the Clear Lake area and the Hill Patwin/Wintun of the Capay Valley. She would adopt her sister's son and her husband would give him their last name: **Marshall McKay**. Marshall's biological father was of the Wintun Nation and he would go on to be an important leader of the tribe as they navigated the proceeds of the Cache Creek Casino and its benefits to the Capay Valley.



I am eternally grateful to Chairman Marshall McKay for his trust in me to research and share the story of the Yocha Dehe in our mutual love of the Capay Valley.

Mabel McKay — *our own*, finds her wares in the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, DC.

Photo to left is courtesy of the Marshall McKay Collection; <https://www.californiamuseum.org/inductee/mabel-mckay>



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We wish to thank the following:

Shipley Walters Center for Yolo County Archives and Library
Services at 226 Buckeye St, Woodland, CA 95695;
(530) 666-8005—call for an appointment to research

And The Friends of the Yolo County Archives—especially Lon Springer

YOCHA DEHE WINTUN NATION

“an independent, self-governed nation that supports our people and the Capay Valley community by strengthening our culture, stewarding our land and creating economic independence for future generations.” <https://www.yochadehe.org/>

Adrienne and Jeff Monroe; and the Stewart Indian School

On our own website greatercapayvalley.org you can buy, but also just read, all Journals & Newsletters, as well as this and other *Small Books* for free, courtesy of this non-profit: The Greater Capay Valley Historical Society. The first Edition of the book *The History and Stories of the Capay Valley* sold-out, but is now in its 3rd Edition as a 2-volume, softcover set of more than 600 pages, including the original book and the more recent Newsletters and other addendums.

I feel so much gratitude for your support over the years as I researched and created several Books, Journals, Newsletter and Videos on the Capay Valley—and while I create still more books, thank you for supporting and contributing to this labor of love! I am still working on *Monroe for Sheriff, 60 Consecutive Years Serving Yolo County 1911-1971* and also *Basil Campbell, a Slave in California*, among others.

Yours, Elizabeth “Betsy” Monroe

Back Cover