

Donations and Memberships/Subscriptions Accepted at address on page bottom and back cover

CAPAY VALLEY

March 2011

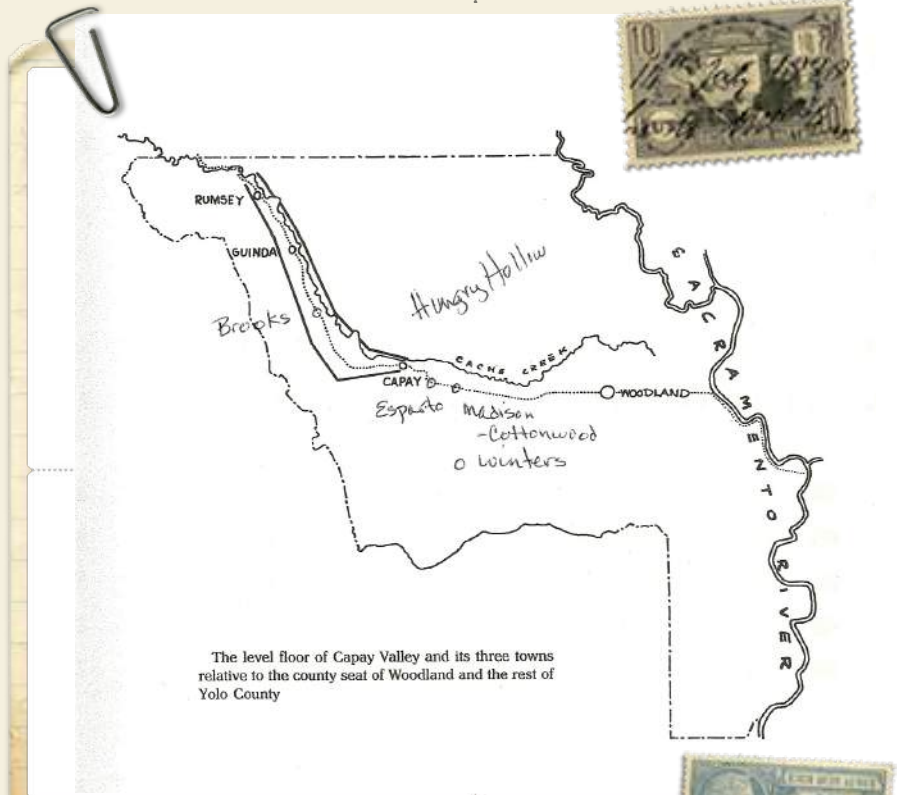
Volume two

The Greater Capay Valley
Historical Society
PO Box 442
Esparto, CA
95627
EMAIL
EMONROE353@GMAIL.COM

*Focusing on the
Greater Capay
Valley, including
towns and areas
surrounding and
leading to Cache
Creek and up the
Capay Valley*

Pictures and Stories to tell a history of a special area.

This second volume of the Greater Capay Valley Journal will continue exploring family histories and interesting characters, events, flora and fauna, agriculture and geography of the area.



The level floor of Capay Valley and its three towns relative to the county seat of Woodland and the rest of Yolo County

At left: Pioneer ball gown made in 1873 by Gertrude Freeman, who gave Woodland its name, to wear to a ball when her husband Frank S. Freeman served as a state legislator. Modeled here by Jean Polk (later Mrs. Tom Monroe of Hungry Hollow) as a candidate for the title of 1948 Sugar Queen at the Yolo County Fair.





Contents:

PAGE 1 -- CONTENTS AND BIBLIOGRAPHICAL CITATIONS

Page 2 -- Contents; Introduction by Editor

Page 3-8 -- *Rancherias, Ranchos and Ranches*; Oaks; Native plants; Poison Oak

Page 9-12 -- Colorful Character: Sheriff James "Sunny Jim" Monroe

Page 13-16 -- Cache Creek and the Capay Dam -- then and now.

Page 17-19 -- Local Personality Peggy Wood; Wood and Stephens families in the Capay Valley

Page -20 Membership and Subscription info

Works Cited:

Nareau, Douglas Gordon, *Historic Land Uses in the Esparto Judicial Township, A Thesis by Douglas G. Nareau*, Cal State University, Sacramento, CA, 1979

Powers, Stephen, *Tribes of California*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 1976

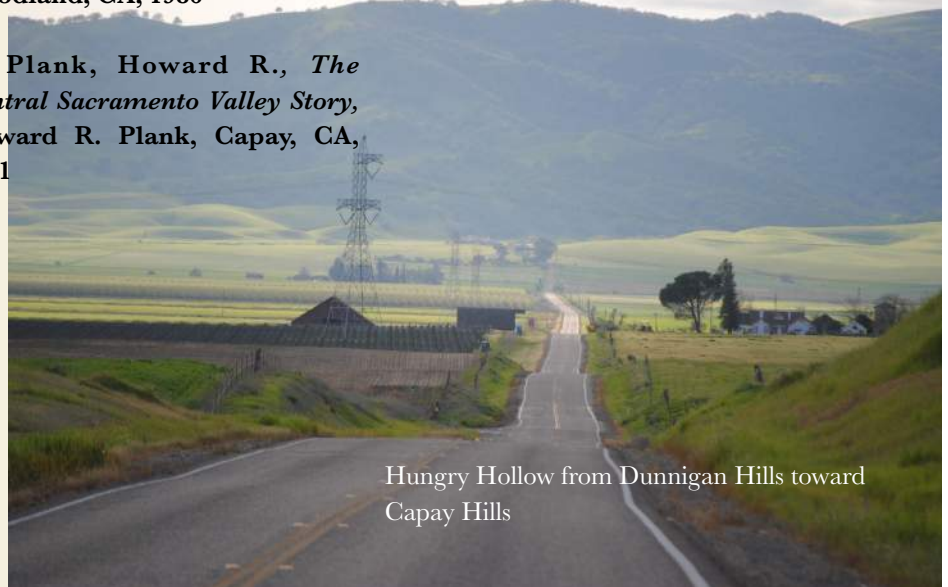
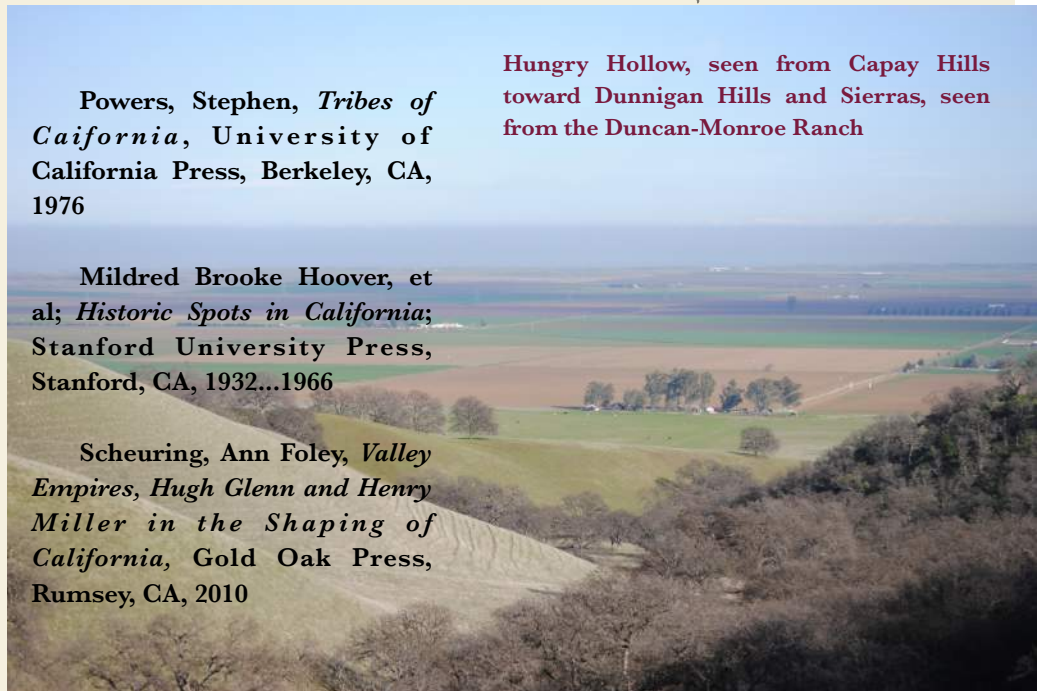
Mildred Brooke Hoover, et al; *Historic Spots in California*; Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 1932...1966

Scheuring, Ann Foley, *Valley Empires, Hugh Glenn and Henry Miller in the Shaping of California*, Gold Oak Press, Rumsey, CA, 2010

Merhoff, Ada, *Capay Valley, The Land & The People 1846-1900*, Roger C. Franke, Woodland, CA, 1986

Plank, Howard R., *The Central Sacramento Valley Story*, Howard R. Plank, Capay, CA, 2011

Hungry Hollow, seen from Capay Hills toward Dunnigan Hills and Sierras, seen from the Duncan-Monroe Ranch



Hungry Hollow from Dunnigan Hills toward Capay Hills



Abundant Capay Valley Oaks, as seen from The Summit in May 2010 --en route to 90th birthday party for Alfred Hayes.



HISTORY IS ALL ABOUT VIEWPOINT...

Editor, Elizabeth Monroe

...and The Greater Capay Valley Historical Society is intent on exploring them all!

I came “home” to Hungry Hollow and the Greater Capay Valley to write about my family’s long history in the area, but in the process have learned so much of interest that I have taken the advice of those I have interviewed and am publishing a journal of what I learn as I do the research.

This is journal volume 2 and will continue some threads from volume 1 and build on the overview and timeline introduced there. “Old-timers” and “newcomers” will be interviewed, tying the two together. Sheriff James “Sunny Jim” Monroe’s memoirs will be continued, and I will continue to ask for feedback from readers--what can you add and what have I gotten wrong?! Submissions of appropriate pictures, poems and short tales are encouraged, as are informative articles, if they tell the story of the area.

From the various historical documents I got the following:

Rancherias, Ranchos and Ranches

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 in the Capay Valley. A more in-depth study of how it played itself out here has been done by others and is in the process by the local tribe itself, 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



Manzanita



Uncle John’s Cabin in “Duncan’s Grove”



Cache Creek from Capay Bridge in June 2010, bordered with Willow, Cottonwood, native grasses and shrubs. Much of the water from Clear Lake is diverted to irrigation canals.

live in the pueblos or to rancherias sponsored by the mission system.

The approximately 300,000 California natives were considered much less agricultural or warlike than many tribes on the east coast or plains, thought to be 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 simplistic and somewhat offensive nickname “Digger Indians” by the early outsiders who became acquainted with them. The Capay Valley native population was similar, 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; possibly a similar reduction occurred in the Valley as well, though the presence of Spanish colonizers was never to a great extent.

The Spanish established far fewer land grants in California than did the Mexicans, who had won their independence from Spain 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. 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 in 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 [some historians claim this number is too high]. 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 led to dry farming, while the rolling hills led to natural cattle grazing. It wasn't long before many of those 100,000 newcomers



Iconic ancient oak on Taber Ranch, 2008



A view within the historic “Duncan’s Grove” of oaks today



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 were 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, local settlers bought up pieces of huge land grants as they became available and farmed or ranched thousands of acres in the lush valley and the flats and rolling hill areas surrounding it. In addition to wheat and cattle, the fertile valley with its natural watershed proved also suited to orchards and vineyards.

According to Eftimeos Salonites in his *Berreyesa, The Rape of the Mexican Land Grant Rancho Canada de Capay*, La Canada de Capay means the valley of the stream, which he describes as "...a beautiful valley! It is certainly a valley of hope!"

He then goes on to say, "Capay Valley during the 1840s was a wilderness with sufficient water and feed for the survival of the

animals...herds feeding on the open plains...the high peak above the valley became known as Berryessa Peak. It is over 3000 feet in elevation and is the highest peak of the Blue Ridge Mountains, which run through Yolo County. These mountains are also called the Capay Hills, for this range of mountains forms the western boundary of Capay Valley..." These old descriptions from his ancestors' first viewings of the valley go on to say, "Within the valley, this stream seemed to run the length of the valley...lined with willow, cottonwood, some pine, and some of nature's finest specimens of oak trees." And speaking of the many majestic and useful oaks in the area, he goes on to tell about *El Roblar*, "This ancient oak grove is located across Cache Creek and north of historic Capay. It is sometimes called 'Thousand Oaks' or 'Duncan Grove'." The first name refers to its grand size and the second to the family of pioneers led by Wyatt Godfrey Duncan and his younger brother William Duncan, who bought up much of the grove area. "This enduring oak grove was known to the Californians, Spanish or Indian, as 'El Roblar'." After Wyatt and his brother William began to settle the area, family members continued to buy up adjacent acres on both



the north and south sides of Cache Creek, much of it covered by these magnificent oaks. For many years the locals enjoyed picnics in the grove at the invitation of the Duncan family, fording the low summer creek in buggies, on horseback, and in later years automobiles. Rodeos on the main ranch became common, as well, surrounded by these beautiful trees.

Capay Valley Oaks

The oaks being described are primarily the Valley Oak, also called White Oak, or colloquially Mush Oak, describing its softer wood and poor use as a building or burning wood. But it was valuable in many other ways. Called "The Sequoias of the Valley," in a recent article in the Sacramento Bee, the Valley oak can stand 40 to 100 feet with a canopy to match, with trunks up to 7 feet in diameter. "Adapted to our dry, hot summers and mild, wet winters, Valley oaks can live for centuries, thanks to their extensive root system. Keeping oaks healthy depends on preserving those roots...This familiar California tree forms the backbone of native habitat...providing shelter and food for many native insects, birds and other animals. That also makes it a major attraction to beneficial insects and birds..." for gardens and agriculture. And before ranchers and farmers came to the area and often removed oaks that stood in their way, the native population "farmed" and maintained the oak forests for thousands of years, the acorns being a major food staple.

The term Valley oak refers to the greater Central Valley, but helps us understand the difference between the huge oaks we see in the Capay Valley floor, as



opposed to those growing higher

up in the surrounding hills. The Valley oak is the largest of the California oaks, and is deciduous in winter, losing its leaves. The most common oaks up into the foothills are the Interior Live oak, an evergreen found up to about 5000 feet elevation, and then the Canyon Live oak found higher, up to 9000 feet. Black oak are also found between 2000 and 6000 feet, but prefer areas with snow and pine. The deciduous, usually shorter Blue oak is common below 3500 feet and can endure dry summers and triple-digit heat.

A symbiotic relationship is shared by the oak and the common Scrub Jay bird. "One jay can pick up and plant 7000 acorns each fall..." carrying away and burying "about an inch or two below the surface" acorns to subsist on through the winter--but leaving enough to sprout in the spring. What is not eaten by the common gophers may someday reach 100 feet!

Of special interest is the oak's ability to hold huge amounts of water in a natural "cistern" within its root system--preventing rain run-off and allowing great drought tolerance. A recent study on this topic done at UCD has Davis and Sacramento rethinking the oak, preferring it to more recent non-natives in city planning.

Resources:

www.hastingsreserve.org : UC Davis' 2500 acre Hasting Reserve biological field station

www.californiaoaks.org : wealth of information on preserving California's native oaks

www.sactree.org : The Sacramento Tree Foundation, active in oak preservation

The Sacramento Bee, October 30, 2010

Capay Valley is a awash in spring with beauty and color: fruit and nut tree blossoms among the native plants.

As the almond blossoms fade, the cherry and apple blossoms boom forth. And the hills and hedgerows are filled with Redbud and other native blooms, such as unique "mules ears"; lupine and Indian Paintbrush abound--and soon the hills will be golden with California Poppies! Such a lush, fertile area. And with new appreciation for native pollinators, as the non-native honey bee populations struggle, many farmers no longer disk right up to the fence lines, but create pollinator habitats of wild flowers and grasses, increasing their yields--along with the beauty of this special, magical area.



Capay Valley Native Plants

can be viewed along the roadways, but are featured also at the Vernon A. Nichols Park in Guinda in the Will Baker Native Plant Garden, named for "longtime local resident, author, UC Davis professor, farmer, cowboy and poet."

These samples were photographed on a hike to Casey Flat south of Guinda in April; Lupine, Redbud and Indian Paintbrush are most abundant.



But beware the Poison Oak!! --and Rattle Snakes!

Growing prettily on the shaded hillsides, often near oak and manzanita, its leaves resemble oak leaves, but turn red with time. Native folk medicine makes a claim that its antidote grows near it and this is the case with the relationship between it and manzanita. Some have tried its remedy with success--though this is not a claim to be a prescription! Boiling the red bark to use as a soak for the skin lesions and the leaves and berries of the manzanita for a tea has been known to reduce the time and severity of the allergic reaction. Having grown up with this knowledge, imparted to my family from the Native People still living on and using the plants and trees on the Duncan Ranch, we used this method to great success--quite possibly saving my brother's life, once!

Of course, the common recommendation is still to wash thoroughly with soap and water after possible contact and to wash all clothing.

There are over-the-counter products to wash with and to apply to the skin, but most people still swear by Calamine Lotion and time...There is still controversy as to the contagion from one infected person to another, but it is wise not to chance spreading it to yourself or others when the lesions are weeping.

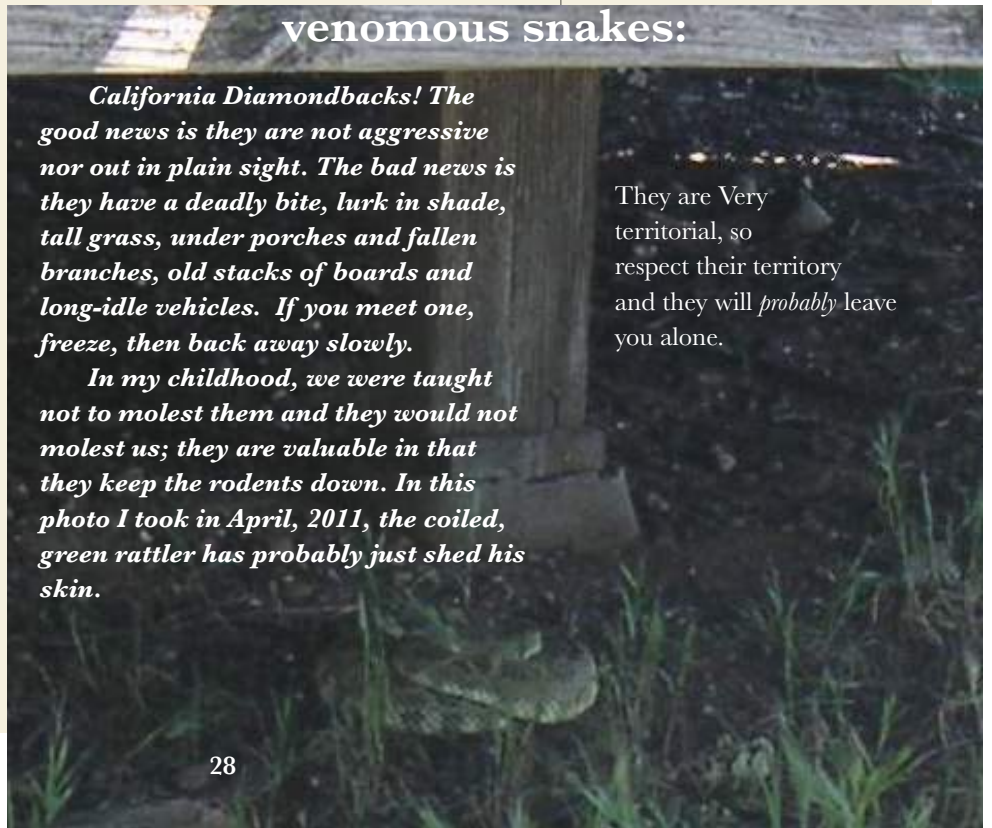
And then there are the native

venomous snakes:

California Diamondbacks! The good news is they are not aggressive nor out in plain sight. The bad news is they have a deadly bite, lurk in shade, tall grass, under porches and fallen branches, old stacks of boards and long-idle vehicles. If you meet one, freeze, then back away slowly.

In my childhood, we were taught not to molest them and they would not molest us; they are valuable in that they keep the rodents down. In this photo I took in April, 2011, the coiled, green rattler has probably just shed his skin.

They are Very territorial, so respect their territory and they will *probably* leave you alone.



Local Color: Sheriff “Sunny Jim” Monroe

*excerpts from the Memoir of James William Monroe, Sheriff of Yolo County from 1911 until 1938
on the 100 year anniversary of his becoming sheriff for 28 years.*

GUNFIGHTS AND MURDERS--SECOND IN A SERIES

A colorful character, my grandfather James William Monroe, referred to as “Sunny Jim” due to his jovial and accepting personality, married a “local girl,” Elvira Grey Duncan of Hungry Hollow, in 1902. Soon afterwards he followed his adventurous heart to the Yukon Territory in search of gold before returning to his ranch in Hungry Hollow. He later ran for political office, leading to a stint as sheriff for 28 years. During that time, he covered much of the greater Capay Valley, and in the memoir published by the *Daily Democrat* newspaper at the end of his career, he tells some interesting stories of those times.



According to those memoirs published by the local *Daily Democrat* in

1938, Sheriff Jim tells that his parents were “covered-wagon immigrants from Missouri in the early 1850s...lived in Eugene, Oregon, where Grandfather was a circuit judge for many years. Later the family moved to Yolo County where Grandfather raised stock...When my father was just 20 years old, he married Sarah Ellen Campbell, then a girl of 17...The house...they resided...in Buckeye district near Winters...built by my mother’s family in the early years of the 19th century...I was born in that house August 5, 1867.

“Our nearest neighbors, I remember, were Benjamin Ely, the Guthries, the Briggs family and the William Griffins. All of them migrated from Missouri in the 50s, and all of them were good Missouri democrats. Many of their descendants are well-know residents of the Winters district today.”

Jim’s father died while the family lived down in Santa Barbara, where they had gone for his health, so Jim and his mother returned to Yolo County. In and out of various school, apparently he was something of a scamp: “..the schoolmaster at the country school in Santa Barbara often spanked me. Miss Barrett, schoolmarm at the Gordon school, didn’t stop with the ‘burch’ stick. She lashed me with her tongue as well. ‘Jim Monroe, you’re a rowdy!’ she’d say, calling me before the whole class. ‘You’ll never amount to anything as long as you live!’”

But after he finished his grammar school course he enrolled at the Hesperian College in Woodland. “That sounds like quite a jump. It wasn’t, really, because high schools didn’t exist at that time.” He attended with William ‘Singing Bill’ Browning, Jimmie and Lee Briggs, James Keys, Harvey Willoughby and Jennie

Dick, all citizens he knew for a long time afterwards while in office. He also attended Pierce’s College in Colusa County for a year in 1885, before returning to his mother’s ranch and beginning ranching in earnest.

“Young and untrained, I was soon up against some tough problems. Ranchers here today will understand what I mean when I say that, as a boy right out of college, I needed a business system. Ranching the way I was doing it was too much of a gamble. So I enrolled at Stockton Business college, and studied banking and bookkeeping..” But being away from the ranch led to a lure for adventure and various jobs including one with the Fresno Sante Fe railroad...and “rather at loose ends...then half-heartedly took a job as peace officer in Firebough, Fresno County. I didn’t know then that I had just set foot to the path I was to travel for the rest of my working days.”

“Firebough started me off right. I found there a mixed, rough crowd which followed the sheep shearings...more than 75,000 head of sheep were being sheared on the Miller and Lux ranges. I took one look at the bunch and thought: ‘Jim Monroe, you’ve headed right for trouble.’

“That guess of mine turned out to be no joke, all right enough. I’d just gotten myself a shiny badge and a speaking acquaintance with some of the townsfolk, when trouble broke her tether and stampeded.”

Soon, “a cowboy was stabbed to death...every cowboy in Firebaugh swore to avenge the death, and came within an ace of doing it..”

“The constable, Joe Lambert, came to me and told me that trouble was brewing. ‘Those cowboys are a wild outfit,’ he said, ‘You’ve got to



help me, Jim, or they're going to shoot holes in our law and order.'

"I was young and hot-headed. The dangerous situation fanned my youthful imagination and appealed to me. 'You bet I'll help!' I said.

"We made our plans...I was to get a span of horses and a spring wagon and drive quietly up to the hotel, where Lambert would be waiting with the prisoner.

"I drove the spring wagon up to the hotel...They jumped aboard. 'Let her go, Jim!' The constable's voice throbbed with excitement...

"I gave those ponies the length of my whip and they tore out at a dead run. The spring wagon bucked and jolted. It surely was one wild ride.

"The cowboys saw us clearing out and gave chase. I can hear them yet--yelling for me to stop and shooting bullets that sang around our heads like angry hornets. You bet I didn't stop to answer. We thundered across the bridge into Madera county and on without pause to Madera City."

Sadly, seeing that he was 'saved,' the prisoner then bragged about the crime and Jim learned a lesson about the law: doing the right thing did not always go down well. As a result of this adventure he was made deputy constable and learned much about the job before returning to Yolo County in 1903.

Having married a local girl from Hungry Hollow in 1902, he returned to ranching...but in 1904 his lust for adventure led him off to Alaska, even though it was near the tail end of the big rush of 1897.

Well, even though his new wife came from just such adventuresome pioneers and did not stand in his way, his days panning for gold eventually did not *pan out*--but more on his Yukon adventures later! Now, back to some adventures closer to the Capay Valley; how about a shoot out on the streets of Esparto?

Though he does not give the exact date, he attributes several murders between 1911 and 1938 to the combined use of alcohol and firearms. In this tragic story of JC Clark and Dick Revel, both residents of Esparto, they were "fast friends and seemed far from wanting to hurt each other.

"No one seems to know the subject of their quarrel. They had been drinking and some slight disagreement arose. Hot words were exchanged. The orgy ended in a shattered friendship.

"Clark was a sensitive man, and returning home, he brooded. He got to hating his former friend. The next morning, before the fumes of liquor had worn away, he loaded his pistol and went down into Esparto's main street.

"A few minutes later he met Revel. There was a short pause. The two men stared at each other. I think Revel was just getting ready to suggest they forget it.

"Then the crack of a pistol put an end to the quarrel--and to Revel's life. His former friend had shot him to death.

"Clark was hanged at San Quentin. To the last he never regretted his own fate or showed any fear of his terrible death. But his repentance was very real over the murder of his friend."

"Sunny Jim" credits his bravery to lessons he learned in life working with all sorts of people--and to his own less than sterling behavior as a youth! One case that illustrates this is when a murder took place in District 108 (near Grimes) and ended with the suspect holed up in a cabin with his victim, surrounded by officers.

"When I came, I supposed the slayer would be arrested and helpless in handcuffs, but I found the opposite was true. The slayer was unmolested in the cabin where he had barricaded himself...the first thing i saw was [his] form sharply etched against the drawn shades...The coroner was dashing up and down, complaining he couldn't get close enough to claim the body of the victim.

"What's the matter here,' I asked, amazed by this unexpected scene.

"[he] has barricaded himself in his cabin. He'll shoot if anyone comes close!"

"I started forward. Someone tried to stop me. 'Don't do it, Jim!"

"Bosh!" I replied, exasperated. '[He] knows me. He won't refuse to listen to what I have to say.'

"I was pretty sure of my man. So I approached the cabin without any particular qualms.

"Hello in there!" I called. 'This is Jim Monroe. Heard you were in trouble...come to see what's the matter. Come out and talk to me'."

Since the sheriff was alone the slayer came out and put down his weapon: "I know that you'll see that I'm dealt with fairly, Jim...I'll go with you'." Convicted of second degree murder, he was sentenced to 18 years.



[Text below is excerpted from the Wednesday Daily section of a local newspaper at the time-- typically beautiful old prose!]

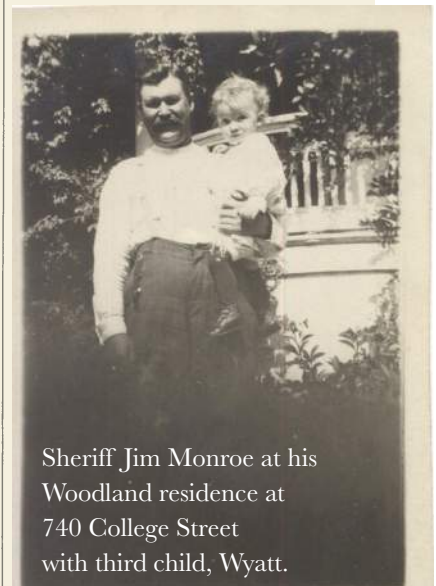
**Wedding Chimes: James William Monroe to Elvira Grey Duncan,
April 9, 1902**

**A Union of Two Lives Near Capay on Which the Sun of Promise
Beams Brightly**

At 11 o'clock this morning a very pretty wedding was solemnized near Capay. The contracting parties were Mr. James William Monroe, of Madison, and Miss Elvira Grey Duncan, of Capay. The ceremony occurred at the residence of the bride's parents, Mr. and Mrs. W. G. Duncan, the rev. George Meeker of Winters, officiating. The company that witnessed the tying of the nuptial knot consisted of about 30, mostly relatives of the bride and groom. The Duncan residence was beautifully decorated for the occasion. The bride wore a handsome costume very becoming to her fine form and beautiful face.

Mr. and Mrs. Monroe received many elegant and useful presents. Upon the conclusion of the ceremony they were warmly and heartily congratulated. The union is regarded as a particularly happy one by relatives and friends of both parties. The wedding breakfast was an elaborate affair and the hour spent around the festal board was enjoyable as much for the feast of reason and for the flow of soul as for the excellence of the menu.

Mr. and Mrs. Monroe were accompanied to the Capay Depot by quite a company of relatives and friends, and they must have felt highly gratified at the expressions of good will and best wishes that followed them as the train pulled out of the station. Their honeymoon will be spent in San Francisco. In about 10 days they will return to the vicinity of Madison, which will be their future home.



Sheriff Jim Monroe at his Woodland residence at 740 College Street with third child, Wyatt.



Sunny Jim and Grey take in the sights in SF and pose for postcards with friends in 1909.

Handwritten in pencil by Grey on the back of one addressed to her mother in Capay:

Arrived all safe and sound. Taking in all the gaities. We are second to none in automobiling. Johnson & Kitchel not excepted.

Jim & Grey

NOTE: by 1918 the couple had 7 children, all but one of whom lived out most of their lives in Yolo County. The couple is buried in Woodland along with many relatives and offspring, but two have headstones in Duncan plots in the Capay Cemetery: James Wm, Jr., and Tom J Monroe, near many Duncan ancestors and relatives.



The bride is the only daughter of Mr. and Mrs. W.G. Duncan, of Capay. The Duncan family is an old and honorable one, and for years has been widely known and influential in Yolo County. No member of the family is held in higher esteem than the fair young woman who upon this perfect April day was led to the altar blushing like the morn. She is a native of Yolo County and is respected and admired for her beauty, intelligence, refinement and many charming traits of character. Her culture, amiable manners and sweet disposition make her society much prized. Mr. Monroe is considered a fortunate young man in having won the heart and hand of such a lovely bride.

James W. Monroe is the only son of Mrs. John T. Monroe [nee Sarah Campbell], and is a worthy representative of an old and highly respected name. He is a young man of splendid ability and excellent character, and his reputation for industry, integrity, and enterprise is without reproach. The horizon of his future is bright and hopeful, and he begins his new relations under fair skies. If good wishes are of any avail, the future of Mr. and Mrs. Monroe will be happy and prosperous.



Cache Creek does not flood like it used to...

...though this year it was hard to convince some newer locals of this fact! We had several storms that dusted the hills with snow--a pretty rare occurrence here even once a year, let alone several times. And others that caused the creek to rise and rage and even flood in places. But just like all *old-timers*, you could hear us claim how this was nothing compared to what we had known in decades past!

At the peak of the rains on March 20, when our power was out all day, I took a drive up to the Capay Bridge and marveled at the raging creek--but recounted to my companion the time my father, Tom Monroe, was coming home one stormy night from the Dixon Cattle Auction and the creek was so high it had washed out the bottom of the bridge. Just before he got his old red cattle truck onto the safety of the north bank, a hole broke through and his rear tire and axle fell through and became wedged. Unable to get it out alone--though happily it was empty of cattle--he trudged through the howling storm to his brother Jim Monroe living in the old Duncan-Monroe house and got a ride home, four miles north in Hungry Hollow. The next day they went to the truck and were able to pull it out with Jim's own truck.

As we stood on the current bridge and saw the creek at its peak for the day, just up to the banks, it was hard to imagine it ever getting so high it could bottom out the bridge--and happily it no longer does! And this is not a result of the new bridge, but rather a series of dams and reservoirs. Like them or not, before

the Capay Dam in 1914 and its restoration in 1993 and the Indian Valley Dam and reservoir, entire towns and the whole of Hungry Hollow often flooded. Bridges washed out and



access roads were impassable for days--even weeks. In the 1950s, more than once, we awoke at home 4 miles north of the Capay Bridge to see a sea of what we called "chocolate milk" surrounding our small home--the old kitchen would have 5 inches of standing water, since like many old cabins, it was added to the house later and sat on no foundation at all. As we were trapped on the north side of Cache Creek, the town of Capay and many of the lower parts of the Capay Valley and feeder towns like Madison and Esparto were flooded and the roads useless.





The Capay Dam, originally built in 1914, is a diversion dam owned and operated by the Yolo County Flood Control & Water District. Above are two pictures as it looked just before the world's longest rubber bladder dam was added in 1993. At left, before it spills over, you can see the structures to hold the wooden slats--often a dangerous operation--which regulated the flow as needed to avoid floods and to allow for irrigation. The project was to better regulate water released by the Yolo County Water District from Clear Lake into Cache Creek; and Indian Valley Reservoir, created with an earthen dam in 1975, on the North Fork of Cache Creek, about 40 and 45 miles upstream, respectively. NOTE: Though Indian Valley Dam is in Lake County, it was built by Yolo County.



At left, early reconstruction in 1993; while below is how the dam looked on a sunny day in January 2011.

Seen below, the bladder lies to the left of the dam, just below the surface. The new aprons and spillways help mediate the flows...





NOTE: While the Capay Dam is only accessible over private land, The Indian Valley reservoir is in the Bureau of Land Management's Walker Ridge Recreation Area. All types of recreation are allowed, including boating, camping, fishing, hunting, hiking, bicycling and horseback riding. There are two primitive boat/hike-in campgrounds, Blue Oaks and Kowalski.

Now the world's second longest inflatable rubber dam above, at 474 feet long by five feet high, lies dormant to let the waters flow! Note the huge tree trunk wedged on the apron--where it will have to wait a long time for removal!

March 20, 2011 Photos courtesy of Doug Nareau and Betsy Monroe



The original dam was constructed between a Duncan Ranch on the north bank and another Duncan (now Wood Ranch) on the south in 1914. To the left is an ariel view shot in 1968; notice the straight line in the center, holding back a large body of water with a former island, while allowing a narrow stream of Cache Creek and two irrigation canals: Adams Canal to the left and Winters Canal to the right. Below is a photograph taken during construction in 1914.

Historic photos courtesy of Peggy Wood



Capay Dam's rubber bladder, inflated mid-April 2011 below. Note March storm damage: tree still hung up on apron and huge concrete slab dislodged from apron. Left lower corner of far right



Sometimes, Mother Nature has a gift from all her drama, whether it be the periodic flooding or the multi-thousand acres grass fires our area is prone to--more on those fires in future volumes! At this time of year, as spring brings wildflowers and new animal life, flood conditions can add to the beauty and wonder.

Because of this year's heavy rains, the Sacramento River Weir was opened for the first time since 2006, according to Chris Biele at FOX40 News on March 24, 2011. And with that event a rare sight: migratory fish once common--but now rare--in Cache Creek are attempting to swim up stream and have been seen at the Capay Dam, trying valiantly to use the spillways as fish ladders! Living on the Dam has given the Wood family a special opportunity to witness this magic from time to time. Carol (Wood) Grein says, "The water company inflated the dam last week [note above pictures], sending water to the

farmers through the canals--so below the dam is quite different now. Mother Nature really did a number on the landscape. Very beautiful. I always like to see what she does in the 'high water years'. She always sends me lots of 'treasures/rocks' --along with the rattlesnakes! Our otters have a den in the rocks just below the dam's computer shed. I enjoy walking down there in the evening and watching them play and fish. Maybe we will have a new litter sometime soon! Because they opened the weir on the Sacramento River this year, we have either salmon or striped bass attempting to swim up stream. They are trying their hardest in the water shoots on each side of the dam. I used to see that all the time as a kid so it was nice to see it again."

Gene Rominger tells of catching such fish in flood years out of the Hungry Hollow sloughs and small creeks--and he has a fisherman's prize photo to prove his whopper! Gene's parents had a home on

County Road 19 and Gene, always an avid hunter and fisherman, spent much of his youth there. When not working the various harvests, he found time to hunt and fish--and sometimes he didn't need to go farther than the local crick!



Above: family photo of Gene Rominger with his prize catch: a huge salmon he caught in 1940-41 in a Hungry Hollow slough east of Clover School off County Road 19.

IT IS THE SPECIAL "CHARACTERS" THAT GIVE A COMMUNITY ITS HEART--
ITS CHARACTER, ITS STORIES AND LEGENDS!

Each volume of this journal will explore just such colorful people from our past and our memories--our lives.

What is the definition of a "friend"? Someone you can count on? Someone you light up to see and think on? Someone you call by her first name, certainly. My dad used to say you could count yourself lucky if your really good and true friends filled an entire hand with no fingers left over to count. Since I got back home after a 40 year absence, I think a lot about his comment—and know that he was right. And then there are those other friends, that you see rarely and know only a little, but whom you never forget and always treasure. Peggy Wood is such a friend—and not only to her own *good and true* friends, but to thousands of people who went to Esparto schools in the 60s, 70s and into the 80s. Not only have I remembered her kindness and sweet spirit fondly all these years, but as I have been spending time with her recently, I have come to really appreciate why that is—and everyone I talk to who knew her as I did, as guardian angel/school secretary, has shared a similar fondness for her.

Let me start by saying that my parents raised us better than to call the

school secretary by her first name—that privilege was limited for us in those days to only the closest adult family friends. But everyone called her *Peggy*. It took down the walls, but it left the respect and love we all felt for her. And so she has always been Peggy Wood to me—though I certainly did not earn that right by anything I did for her. She was just always there for us in our time of need—and in the hormone-laden confusion of junior high, need is often! My fondest memory was of faking a headache to get out of the noisy classroom and going to the office where she put her cool, kind hand on my forehead and let me go lie down in the dark ditto room on the cot. Knowing full well I was not really *ill*, she eventually came in to offer me the job of running off dittos—do you remember that great smell of ditto ink!?—and then let me deliver them to classrooms before going back to class. Today I might be diagnosed with something, but certainly the distractions of the normal hubbub of a classroom forced me to seek solitude from time to time. She just *knew*. And even more amazing, every time I came

home to the Capay area to visit family and friends, and had the good fortune to run into her, she knew who I was—she remembered us all!

And now I have had the privilege of really getting to know her. Interestingly, the first thing I find out is her name is not *Peggy* at all! Her mother, Alice Marie Griffin, named her Mary Anne for her own two aunts, but her dad, Ben Gray Stephens, said, "You can name her that if you want, but I am calling her *Peggy*." And that was that. So the name was pure endearment from day one--and so it has remained for so many of us.

Peggy's grandfather, Joe Boggs Griffin and his wife Helene, owned the original Buckhorn Saloon in Winters, and Peggy's brother Ben opened the small steak house in back before eventually taking over the whole operation. My grandfather, Sheriff "Sunny Jim" Monroe, was born in the Buckeye and Winters area and was close friends with the family, leading our family to eat in the small steakhouse often: Buckhorn steaks for the adults and Spikehorn steaks for us kids. When my

***Peggy Wood**--school secretary and guardian angel to thousands of locals for over 20 years, her staff picture here captures her the way most of us remember her! The pioneer family name, Stephens, is her maiden name; married to another pioneer family member, Maurice Wood from the Capay Valley. Further tying her to early pioneers, Peggy's maternal great-grandfather, John Andrew DeVilbiss, built the Winters Hotel, where-in her maternal grandfather, Joe Boggs Griffin, put the Buckhorn Saloon. Today the renovated hotel and saloon still house the ever popular **Buckhorn Steakhouse** in Winters. On the Stephens side, her father Benjamin Gray was one of 11 children descended from George Dickson Stephens and Nannie (Lucas); two of her uncles, his brothers, were William Fulton, who married Anna Louise Birch, and Paul, who married Alice Martin; and their sons, respectively, are her 1st cousins "Fulty" and "Sonny" Paul, still living in the immediate area--as are many of their spouses, siblings, children and grandchildren!!*

***Of interest:** the Wood home was built in 1914 on Duncan property with money Irene Wood earned by feeding the workers on the Capay Dam. She and her husband, Iverson Duncan, later sold the house to her uncle, Joel Elmer and Margaret (Bauer) Wood.*





grandfather was killed in an auto accident near there in 1939, they put a memorial shrine to him in the saloon (now main dining room), which remained for many decades.

Peggy mostly grew up in the Esparto and Winters area, and attended Esparto High School—where she met her future husband, Maurice Wood. Maur, as she fondly called him for the next 70-plus

years, was in the class ahead of her and descended from one of the earliest pioneer families of the Capay Valley. Maur, grandson of Joel Wood and Emmarine (Clark), and son of Joel Elmer Wood and Margaret (Bauer), grew up on Cache Creek and attended Cadenasso School before graduating from EHS in 1938. When Peggy graduated a year later they soon found themselves married

and expecting: first-born Fulton Maurice, was followed by Philip Stephens and Carol Anne—and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Their first years were spent following the local work and living in several places—including, I was tickled to discover, the same house I, too, briefly lived in on the Monroe Ranch—until they settled where they remained since 1952: buying

half his parents' ranch, they moved into the 1914 Wood home and Maur's parents built a smaller home next door.

And there she is today, enjoying her family and many friends in the beautiful Wood home on Cache Creek near the Capay Dam. And there I have been privileged to sit and visit, and am often reminded of a quote by Mark Twain: "We sat and talked. We steeped our thirsty souls in the reviving wine of the past...the beautiful past...uttered the names that had been silent upon our lips...and it was as if they were made of music; with revered hands we unburied our dead, the mates of our youth, and caressed them with our speech; we searched the dusty chambers of our memories and dragged forth incident after incident...and laughed such good laughs over them..." *And I am blessed!*

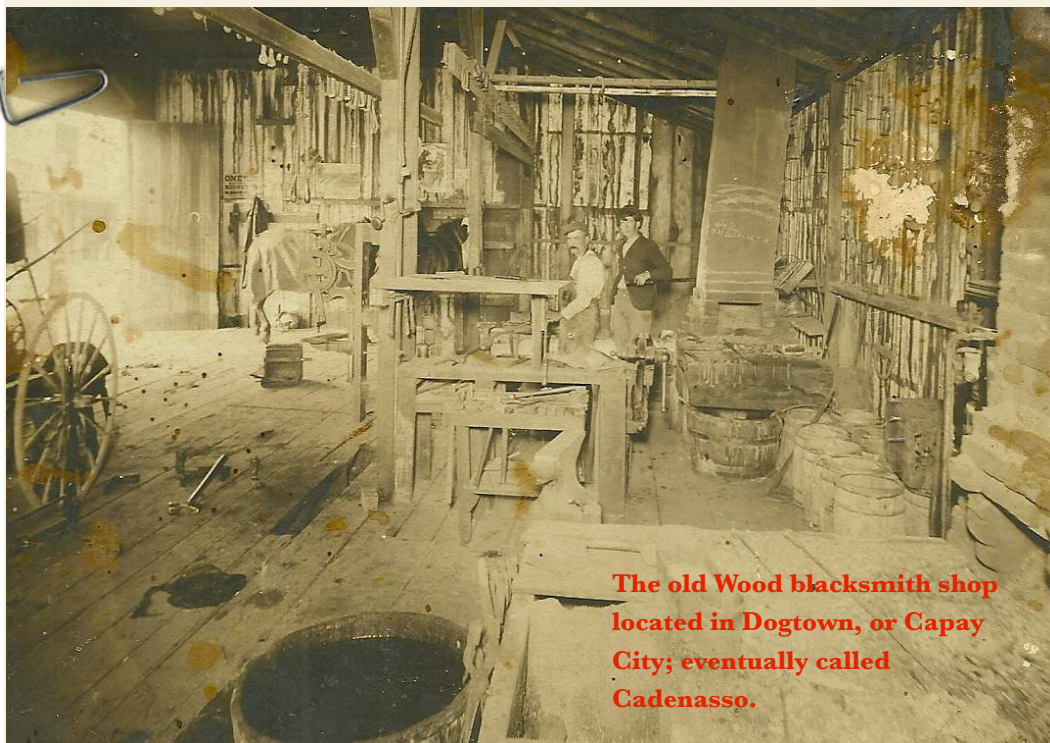


Peggy tells many an interesting tale. One is of the lessons Grandfather Elmer Wood gave to her children about rattle snakes. He challenged them to find the one he knew was lurking near the corn planter (see it

above). After much frustrated searching, he revealed one coiled up inside the seed container of that corn planter!

The old corn planter sits in front of the Wood home today, a reminder of early times--and the mysterious and dangerous habits of local rattle snakes!! Know where to look!

And with these recent heavy rains, the Wood family knows to look for an even heavier snake population--preying on the more abundant rodent and amphibian life near the water.



The old Wood blacksmith shop located in Dogtown, or Capay City; eventually called Cadenasso.

My mom, Virginia Jean Polk, was born in Michigan and came to California in 1936, so she liked to kid my dad, Tom Monroe, that she was the only one who was not related to everyone in the valley: “There was a lot of cross pollinating going on around here, Tom!” she used to joke--but she was not far off! After spending any time at all with the descendants of early pioneer families I find they are nearly all related to me and to each other in some way! Through the 4 Nurse sisters, I am related to Parkers, Garrisons, and Tadlocks, since Aunt Lucille Nurse married my uncle Jim Monroe. Through my numerous Duncan relatives, I am related in some way to Goodnows, Pearsons, Zentners, Tabers, Clines--and Woods!--among others. The house Peggy Wood lives in today was built in 1914 by Joel’s daughter Irene “Rene” Wood, sister of Alfred Wood, and wife of Iverson Duncan, son of Ben Franklin Duncan, my great-great uncle and a Wood neighbor. Another of Ben Duncan’s sons, Wyatt, married May Wood, also Joel’s daughter--you can see how it goes! The Woods are descended from early pioneer Joel Wood, who settled in the area between current county roads 80 (near the old Cadenasso School site) and 82B (including where the Capay Dam is today, just northwest of Capay). In a town then known as Dogtown or Capay City (not to be confused with today’s town of Capay, first known as Langville), Joel had his blacksmith shop and a store, near the Capay City Hotel and, by some accounts, a *notorious* saloon. They were eventually surrounded by other families they often had some relationship with through marriage--many of them Duncans. There is a great excerpt from Ada Merhoff’s book about the Capay people marching down main street after a meeting at the IOOF Hall in Capay to have a party in the Duncan Grove. Peggy says there used to be a dance hall on the Cache Creek there--and when it was taken down, the boards were used to build the big old red barn (below) that sits on her property to this day! Both were then on Duncan property--as the Duncan siblings settled near one another just north and west of the current town of Capay.

Because the Dogtown area was also known as *Capay City*, this area--that would eventually become known as Cadenasso--would build the *Capay School* in 1867. Eventually, in 1896, their school would become *Cadenasso School*, and the school in Langville would be known as the *Capay School* because that town went from Langville to Capay--as it is still known today. Sadly, the beautiful 2-room school house there was torn down; the historic site marked now only by its bell and a plaque. [See the lovely painting



of *Capay School* in the town of Capay on the back page of this journal]. The Cadenasso School is also gone. Throughout Yolo County, several historic one-two room school houses still stand, but only the Canon School in the Capay Valley still stands to represent the typical small rural schools of the Capay Valley. Off of County Road 19 in Hungry Hollow you can see the restored Clover School and off County Road 29 near Winters you can see the Union School, now a residence of the Rominger family. And during the county fair in Woodland in August, visit the Spring Lake School house, a great example of such schools, staffed by the Yolo County Historical Society with knowledgeable “school marms”--some of whom actually attended these one and two room schools, *like me!*

Below: Joel Elmer Wood standing in the back row, 5th from left, attended what was originally called “Capay School” in this 1894 picture. To either side of him stand Nurse children; Silvio Cadenasso stands 3rd from left. Other local family names are represented here as well, including Armstrong, Nichols, Taber, and Russell.





Photo taken by Samantha Waterman, April 28, 2011, at Peggy Wood's home.



Antique water pumps find new purpose, and rogue fruit and nut trees bloom on valley hillsides.

Become a member of *The Greater Capay Valley Historical Society* and receive the first annual subscription to the Journal's 6 bi-monthly volumes. Send a check for \$60 made out to TGCVHS and all your mailing/shipping information to:

The Greater Capay Valley Historical Society
 c/o Elizabeth Monroe, editor
 PO Box 442
 Esparto, CA 95627

Copyrighted 2011

Below, the last Capay School in the present town of Capay, as seen in the eyes of local Capay Valley farmer and artist Charles "Bud" Gordon, in its prime. Bud's mother was Sara Stephens, descended from pioneer George D. Stephens.



CAPAY VALLEY

FROM:

THE GREATER CAPAY VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
 PO Box 442
 Esparto, CA 95627

March 2011

Volume 2



DINGLE SCHOOL, MAY 1935- WOODLAND CAL. HOLLINGSHEAD PHOTO.

Having lived for a time with an aunt in Woodland, Anne Marie "Peggy" Stephens is seen here with her 8th grade class at Dingle School in 1935: second row, 5th from left. She graduated from Esparto High School in 1939. Soon after, she would marry Capay Valley native, Maurice (who preferred Morris or Maur) Wood, descendent of pioneer Joel Wood. Peggy Wood worked for the Esparto School District for over 25 years--and is cherished by thousands in the area to this day. She still resides in the Wood family home in Capay Valley overlooking the Capay Dam on Cache Creek.