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# CAPAY VALLEY

June 2011

Volume three

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

Pictures, Stories and Research to reveal and celebrate a very special place.

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

*The volume 2 rattle snake picture and information generated interest--and confusion. Yes, they do look a lot like the harmless gopher snake--see it compared at near right. AND a gopher snake can even "rattle" if in dry grass and able to vibrate its tail to try to fool you when it is frightened or angry! But the diamond head-shape is a give-away: the rattler has a large triangular head--better to tuck in those venom-delivering fangs! And at the other end will almost invariably be a set of rattles--longer as the snake ages and sheds. Both will bite if provoked, but only the rattler carries venom. BUT both keep the rodent population in check!*



*Both examples above and at near right are **valuable** and harmless "Gopher Snakes"--which we are seeing in abundance this time of year, as spring and summer bring out the food: rodents, birds, frogs, etc. **Rattle snakes are more elusive--but they are there, so beware!***





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*Special thanks to: Robert Taber, Peggy Wood family, Wyatt Cline, Martin Armstrong, Jean & Kim Chevalier, Douglas Nareau, Gene Rominger, the John D. Stephens family, and Jim Hiatt.*

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Antique tractor on Stephens' *Historic Oakdale Ranch*  
--old saddle is extra!



**Gene Rominger's steep hill barley harvest on the leased Haines place at the west end of County Road 25. The Caterpillar D7 tractor is about 1954, pulling the old metal John Deere 36B harvester from the 1950s. (Watch the video on our website at [greatercapayvalley.org](http://greatercapayvalley.org) under Hayes and Rominger, as Gene visits his D7 and discusses the 36B with Donny Hayes)**

photo courtesy of Gene Rominger





## Elderberry and VELB

### HISTORY IS ALL ABOUT VIEWPOINT...

Editor, Elizabeth Monroe

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

Just as the sometimes misidentified snakes can be seen as either harmful or beneficial, so can other flora and fauna. It has been a fascinating journey of discovery for me, coming back after so many years to find that *star thistle* is a dangerous--not just annoying--invasive transplant and that the ubiquitous black walnut on our ranch may not all be "native" [more in next volume]. It has also been interesting to find common bushes like the elderberry growing so much more abundant--only to find it is because it is habitat for a controversially-protected beetle--Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle or VELB--and not due to some recent re-appreciation for the amazing medicinal properties of elderberries and elderberry wine. And then there are all these more recent orchards and vineyards out in my remembered flat grainlands of Hungry Hollow--messing up the view of my beloved Capay Hills that I came *home* to enjoy from

the front porch! And what is with all the sunflowers?! Is this the south of France, Van Gogh? But the irrigation that made orchards and vineyards possible in what used to be a dry-farming paradise also brought abundant crane-like white egrets and blue herons I never recall seeing here 50 years ago--beautiful! And may be responsible for lowering the over-all high temperatures of the summers!? No more 118-120 days, but plenty of 103-106 days! Occasionally, I have the thrill of hearing a pheasant--not as often as I was used to, but trying to make a comeback: formerly over-hunted, but also having lost its habitat to changes in farming and the invasive non-native wild turkeys, which some people find so charming--and others delicious! My hunter brother is so dismayed at the reduced pheasant population he now hunts the turkey instead of pheasant--and has developed a great BBQ sauce for them! And those cute little ground squirrels and rabbits, cotton tail and jack--they are so abundant and destructive to oaks, crops and orchards, farmers and ranchers *hire* locals to shoot them...though I have not heard any mention of squirrel or rabbit stew or kababs hitting the local menus--yet!

Above left is the flowering plant and above right the berry. Below it the protected VELB, *Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle*--both the beetle and the magic of the berry live here. Typically used medicinally by native populations, you will today see Elderberry in the vitamin aisles at Whole Foods and the food co-ops—oh, and a delicious wine, anyone?--hold the beetle!!  
**United States Department of the Interior  
 FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
 Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office  
 2800 Cottage Way, Room W-2605  
 Sacramento, California 95825**  
 Conservation Guidelines for the  
 Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle -- 9 July 1999





**Photos:** Above, top 2 pictures taken from the internet show typical barley to the left, wheat to the right. The lower 2 pictures above left are of locally grown: Durst Farms organic barley is on far left--grown for organic dairy feed; Schaupp Farms wheat is on the right. At far right is a field-shot of the currently ubiquitous wheat (Schaupp Farms). In decades past, brewing barley was more common out here--used even in

brews in Europe! In the 1920s we had "Yolo Beer"! But the "market" determines what is planted, of course...

Out where I now live in Hungry Hollow, traditionally-grown barley and wheat border 2 sides of my house while organic barley and other crops border another--Organic and Traditional somehow finding a way to co-exist, though the farmers' opinions and practices differ, obviously. It's all about viewpoint, after all. So, no matter one's view point, this is a magical and mysterious place--both its history and its present time!

When I first heard that Jim Durst was growing organic barley near my house I assumed it was for the making of organic breads or brews or something. But I came to find out it is for the feed of organic dairy livestock--as is the organic alfalfa. Well, OK,

that makes sense. I had just read in the May 29, 2011, **Sacramento Bee** about the Manas Ranch Old-Style Custom Meat Market, soon to open just outside Esparto at 26797 Highway 16, and that Manas "raises 100 Angus-Hereford grain-finished cows without hormones or antibiotics." And while the article did not say they were "organic," per se, nor tie the two together, the new trend to raise and feed livestock more locally and purely means a coordinated effort like the ones that today take place in the greater Capay Valley area: "Here's clear community infrastructure that serves a particular demand because of the growing awareness of the side effects of the concentrated meat industry," the Bee quoted



Thomas Nelson, president of Capay Valley Farm Shop, "which delivers boxes of locally produced food to about 450 families, and produce to corporate cafeterias." Also grown locally is Riverdog Farm's "Riverdog





#### *Wild California Rye Grass*

*All this "Global Weirdness" of late rains and early sunshine has caused much change in growing patterns--and sometimes havoc! Beautiful and native wild grasses like the rye grass above is everywhere--but the poison oak is also bolting, sometimes to the size of trees! Beware!! [Note it to the right in the above rye grass picture!] A recent walk along a nature path near the coast and an attempt to paddle down the Feather River was alarming in the forests of poison oak--we were forced to turn back! Walks along Cache Creek and other smaller creeks and brooks and in the surrounding hills are showing similar patterns--so take care!*

*Reds, pasture-raised organically grown hogs, a cross between wild boars and conventional breeds" mentioned in the same article. The growing movement to eat locally and more purely fits right in in a tight-knit area like this. This isn't to say there are not advantages to a global market place, but there are growing fears of eating tainted foods, global scares like the recent one in Germany and all of Europe over the new strain of e-coli. While, at the same time, our local farmers are being helped by being so tied to "rising commodity prices worldwide," so that "most California farmers are making hay while the sun shines," according to the Bee on May 8, 2011. "California agriculture is intertwined with global and domestic markets in all sorts of ways" and praised as "a pinpoint of light in the dismal economy, with farm exports booming" The article goes on to say California's "nut, citrus, alfalfa and other crops are big business, generating \$34 billion a year from more than 25 million acres of farmland." And due to the global market and shifting economies and tastes, our local crops like rice and wheat and barley, as well as tomatoes and nuts and seeds, are enjoying increased demand. Add to that the locally-grown movement clamoring for our meats, cheeses, produce and wines and olive oils, and this looks like a great time to be in farming and ranching!*

*Of course, every farmer and rancher knows that the boom years are weighed against the bust years and lean years, and that for every commodity that is in boom there is one in bust: for instance, the livestock, egg and dairy industry is hurting due to the spiraling costs of grains in such high demand. Shifting tastes and desire for high protein helped, but the cost of grains hurt. In this business, it is always something! So a balance between the global market and the local market, traditional and organic, conventional versus experimental crops and methods, is all important.*

***Back to the Manas cut-n-wrap:** the brain child of Fred and Alice Manas, old-time local farmers, it will serve the needs of local meat processors and hunters, as well as all other regular*

*Greater Capay Valley Historical Society, PO Box 442, Esparto vol 3*



shoppers: Manas will sell an entire cow to a group of customers--800 pounds of beef is a lot for one family!--but will also sell individual steaks and on-site made burger, sausage and cured meats. Cutting out the middle man and carving off the travel time and cost to a distant meat processor is what will make the difference--both for Manas and the clients. The appreciation for removing the middleman or broker comes from decades of farming tradition for Fred Manas: having grown up in the Winters area in peach farming, he and Alice began farming peaches on a local 25 acres in 1979 and today have a 5000-person mailing list, and are the biggest peach farmers in Yolo County with 130 annual tons of fruit.

**Other local innovation** includes habitat management in farming, such as the renewed interest in hedgerows between fields. UC Davis has long been a leader in encouraging this method of increasing yield due to providing natural habitats for native pollinators, while reducing the need for costly--and sometimes dangerous-- fertilizers and pesticides. Most recently, the loss of the all-important bee colonies sparked a new movement, and according to an article in the Sacramento Bee March 22, 2011, former veterinarian "John Anderson and Yolo

County are at the center of a movement to incorporate wildlife habitat into cultivated farms." As growers and ranchers become increasingly aware that water and air quality are improved by the hedgerows, and that this and the "prevalence of native plants and animals are just as vital to their yields as soil health," it is obvious hedgerows--filled with game birds, beneficial pollinating insects and bugs--serve an even greater purpose. John Anderson now grows native plants and seeds on 500 acres at Hedgerow Farms near Winters to assist other farmers to be better stewards of the land--and to increase their profits into the bargain!

So, what is the downside? Well, like anything, to get started a farmer needs to invest both time and money: initially the hedgerows must be bought, planted and tended just like the crops. But in a short time, the grasses squeeze out the weeds, the pollinators increase crop yield, the native sedges stabilize pond banks and filter sediments. **"It's hard to get people to change the way they do things," Anderson admits, and the US Dept. of Agriculture's Native Resources Conservation Service, which provides matching funds, has slashed its funding by 60%--it's always something in farming!**

For Information about habitat restoration programs for farmers:

visit Yolo County Resource Conservation District: [www.yolored.org](http://www.yolored.org)

or the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service: [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov)

Anderson's Winters farm sells plugs of native grasses, sedges and rushes, and also seeds, etc., to farmers, restoration groups and the general public: [www.hedgerowfarms.com](http://www.hedgerowfarms.com)

### **The Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation continues its trend toward good land stewardship and valley cooperation.**

In addition to their farming grapes, almonds, wheat, oat hay, safflower and cattle, the tribe is now building a state-of-the-art olive press/mill for the whole valley to use cooperatively. Once again, cutting out the middle man and long commutes helps the local farmers. From the 60 acres owned by the tribe in 1994, they now own 7,700 acres in Capay Valley that they "diversify in an agriculture-based county,"

according to tribal chairman Marshall McKay to the Sacramento Bee, June 2011.

Farming responsibly and sustainably is the focus of the tribal farming practices today--in keeping with a long, local, cultural tradition.







Where had all the Magpies gone--West Nile Virus, nearly everyone...but they are back in promising numbers, along with the similarly depleted Red-winged Black Birds, all squawking away making the summers here sound like they used to!

Spotted in and around the many oaks and perched atop grain stalks, they are a welcome sight again--filling the hot air with their old familiar songs!



*I was alarmed on my return to the Capay Valley at the suspiciously rare sightings of some of my favorite birds, only to hear their numbers had been severely cut by the recent outbreak of West Nile Virus. Growing up in Hungry Hollow in groves of oaks and eucalyptus, I took the squawking of black birds, scrub jays and magpies for granted. One of my favorite family stories is about Sam, the magpie my mom rescued when we found it fallen from a nest high up in an oak tree. One late afternoon, when family friend Jack MacCullah came to have a beer with my dad, they sat at the kitchen table as Mom cooked and we kids milled about. Suddenly, Sam, who had free run of our house, hopped up on the table and strutted over to Jack's beer and took a long quaff. As the men burst into laughter, I came over to see what was so funny and saw Sam strut over to my dad's glass and repeat the performance--and heard my mom say, "Now, Tom, cut that out, you'll make him drunk." Sam repeated this "dance" once more and he was indeed staggering, and then flopped over in the middle of the table while the men rolled with laughter and even Mom had a poorly concealed smirk on her face. Of course she swooped in and collected Sam and took him away to revive--there may even have been a sip of coffee in the story, but perhaps I am embellishing. Well, Sam survived and Mom let the men live, and the story has stuck with me all these years--much to the delight of my daughter, Sam!*

*But my family's history of rescue--and possible comic maltreatment--aside, the magpies have always been ubiquitous to this area and were missed. The yellow-billed magpie lives only in California, primarily in the Central Valley and parts of the Coastal Range. They build large nests high in oaks that can be several feet across and 50 feet up. According to The Sacramento Bee, June 3, 2011, "They mate for life, and extended families nest in the same places for decades. Before the West Nile outbreak, the region had colonies of more than a thousand birds roosting together, although groups of 20 or 30 were more common." Their numbers had already been reduced due to habitat loss, but "plummeted" by half during the 2004 outbreak of the virus.*

*Audubon California* shares my concern and has asked the public to help track California's exclusive **yellow-billed magpie**. They recently organized a count using a network called **eBird**, allowing birders and laypersons to help with the data collection. The count came in at over 3 million sightings in May--quadrupled since 2007!

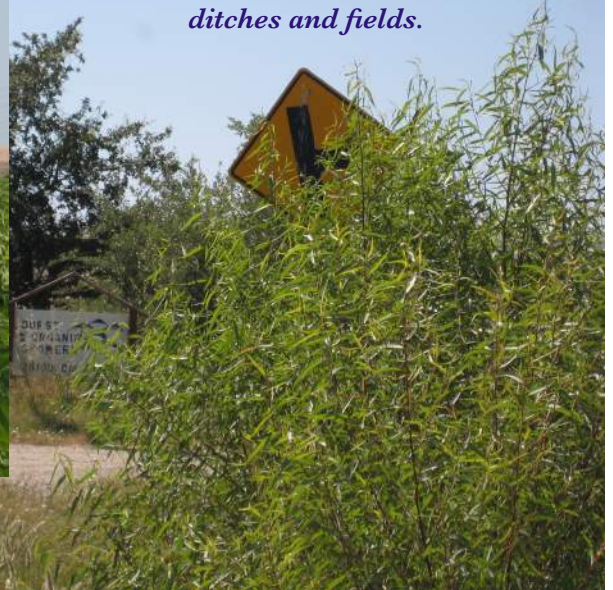
"Apart from its...yellow bill and a yellow streak around the eye," the Yellow-billed Magpie [*Pica nuttalli*] "is virtually identical to the Black-billed Magpie [*Pica hudsonia*] found in much of the rest of North America.," according to Wikipedia—and facts double checked with such other sources as [www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu](http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu). The Yellow-billed Magpie was named *Audubon California's* 2009 Bird of the Year--welcome back, Sam!!



*Below, right: One Red-winged Blackbird sits atop a sunflower in Hungry Hollow, with the Dunnigan Hills in background.*



*Nearby, Durst Organic Growers encourages the native flora and fauna with native grasses along their irrigation and drainage ditches and fields.*



**Diversity of crops helps habitat:**

*Below: Alfalfa hay stacks with new almond orchard rear left, olive orchard rear right,*

*sunflowers near right and Capay Hills in background.*



More Restoration information:  
EDF Environmental Defense Fund  
<http://www.edf.org>  
Audubon Restoration  
[http://audubon-ca.org/LSP/yolo\\_slough](http://audubon-ca.org/LSP/yolo_slough)



For Information about habitat restoration programs for farmers: visit Yolo County Resource Conservation District: [www.yolorcd.org](http://www.yolorcd.org) or the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service: [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov)



# Local Color: Sheriff “Sunny Jim” Monroe

excerpts from the Memoir of James William Monroe, Sheriff of Yolo County from 1911 until 1939  
on the 100 year anniversary of his becoming sheriff for 28 years.

## A TREK TO ALASKA IN SEARCH OF GOLD IN 1904--THIRD IN A SERIES

A colorful character, Yolo County sheriff for 28 years, 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--and finding the real gold was there all the time!

When I, Elizabeth Monroe, was about to graduate from UC Davis in 1978, I was given an opportunity of a lifetime: become a tour director and travel the world on someone else’s dime! But believe it or not, I almost didn’t take it—until Don and Gerry Warren of Esparto, (who had often made the offer to introduce me to their tour agency owning relatives), mentioned that their son and my former EHS classmate, Mike, who was currently working for the agency was in Alaska... “Alaska?! I could go to Alaska?! Why didn’t you say so?!” Well, that was that; having grown up listening to Robert Service ballads of the frozen north I followed my family gene pool and hit the Yukon Trail...well, sort of. Not quite like my grandfather did in 1904, but no promise of China nor South America stirred in me the desire to travel like this chance to see where he had been, panning for

gold, leaving a new wife and small daughter born in 1903 at home in the Capay Valley. He tells the tales I grew up hearing and then concludes with lessons he learned that served him well as future sheriff of Yolo County--and an explanation of how he turned his fortunes around on his return to the greater Capay Valley. “There are strange things done in the midnight sun by the men who moil for gold...” wrote Robert Service, and here is Sunny Jim’s tale, excerpted from his memoir of his time spent as one of these men—and mention of some other Capay Valley old-time family names.



A right smart-lookin' prospector was “Jim” Monroe when he went to Alaska in 1904 in quest of gold.

*Maybe trekking off to Alaska wasn't too good an idea. It meant leaving my home and my wife...She was the only daughter of Wyatt Godfrey Duncan, an early settler in this county, so understood about the wanderlust that grips even the happiest men...when she discovered my long-cherished ambition to join the gold seekers she didn't stand in my way.*

*When I headed for Dawson City, the Mecca of all gold-hungry prospectors, the rush of 1897 was over. It was then 1904. I didn't stay long in Dawson City. “Pan” mining is a migratory occupation. I pulled up stakes for Eagle City, then Washington Creek, where I panned out about \$5 a day. That wasn't much of a “salary,” considering living expenses. Butter, which we got so cheap in Yolo County, cost a dollar a pound...the beer that quenched a miner's thirst cost him two-bits a schooner or a dollar a bottle...But we miners stayed with it, because the dream of “striking it rich” seemed so sure to come true. Weren't fabulous fortunes being wrenched every day from the frozen tundra? That dream of sudden wealth sent me mashing long miles, bent under the weight of a heavy pack. Cooking? My wife would have been worried to death for me had she seen some of the concoctions I cooked and ate. In my case, necessity became the mother of skill. My meals never became*



*“creations,” but after awhile they were edible all right enough.*

To make ends meet, he took a short-term job as a bookkeeper, making a whopping \$8 per day—using the skills he learned in Fresno—and saved enough to go on mining.

*At one time I mined close to Dave and Jim Lowrey [brothers of John, also mining in Alaska]...both well-known residents of Yolo County...we used to sit around their campfire and talk. Of course, our conversations were mostly about friends. Before we knew it, all of us were homesick. My stake near the Lowrey claim didn't pan out for me so I went to Gold Run to prospect. It was an exciting little town. As everywhere in Alaska, all the law was vested in US marshals. They were pitifully inadequate in number.*

*The “Frozen North” was a good friend to a lot of men all right enough...but Sometimes it took a dislike to certain prospectors and was merciless in its treatment of them. This poor fellow I'm going to tell you about was one of that class. [This tale reminds me of *The Cremation of Sam McGee* by Robert Service, the Bard of the Yukon] *The bitter cold, the frightful hardships, the cruel survival-of-the-fittest chase, finally told on his brain. He became demented. He was working one of the mines at Charlie Town, 80 miles down the Yukon from Eagle City. Of course I knew what had driven him crazy. Both of us had faced the solitude and perils of Alaska. All miners have spells when their reason seems to be slipping, and they are face-to-face with the horror of**

*madness. I was genuinely sorry for him, and he seemed to know it; but his violence subsided when I approached. The marshal at Charlie Town took quick advantage of this circumstance and I was delegated to take the insane man to Eagle City on the arrival of the next boat.*

*Traveling with a crazy person isn't any fun. If you haven't met the type of person before, there is something terrifying about it. You know he can't reason and it's no good talking to him. It's like being with an untrained animal. But my man behaved well—until I turned him over to the authorities. They treated him without any consideration and right away he got unruly and at times violent. Right there I learned an important lesson. If a crazed man can appreciate a friendly approach...a sane criminal, whose reasoning powers are intact, is likely to appreciate it even more...I decided that human beings are responsive to kindness and good nature, and it is best to be courteous if the person accosted will permit it. I decided that an arresting officer should refrain from argument, harsh language and abuse. I decided he should try and make the prisoner depend on his word and on square and just dealing from the officer.*

[In the many news articles, interviews, and even his obituary, it is obvious that this was his signature way of dealing with “outlaws” throughout his career as sheriff, which began in 1911. But first, he has to make his way home...]

*Living expenses in Alaska were so high that...I followed the*

*golden trail into Nevada, where George Wingfield, a Nevada cowboy, had opened up new gold fields. I found Tonopah and Goldfield to be just like Dawson City and Charlie Town...centers of feverish activity, crowded with men all straining after the rainbow pot. Pretty soon I began to realize that few of the miners ever would gain what we all were seeking so desperately. I wearied of the whole business. The desire to see my home returned...I abandoned to the others the search for the elusive gold...Back in Yolo I hit the pay streak that had eluded me in Alaska and Nevada...I bought stock, shipped grain for the Southern Pacific, and opened a butcher business in Capay. That last move proved to be a good one. It fitted right in with the stock business and gave me what amounted to a monopoly on supplying all nearby towns with fresh meat.*

Soon my interest turned to more important events. My friends began to speak about me running for a supervisor's job. From my stump-speaking grandfather, William Campbell, [who settled in the Buckeye district in the 1850s and built the house where “Sunny Jim” would be born in 1867] I had inherited a taste for the excitement of political campaigns. And the supervisors met only once a month, so being one of them wouldn't interfere with my stock buying.

[Elected supervisor in 1908, he served 2 years before running for sheriff for the first time and began his 28 year career in January, 1911 —100 years ago this year]



## Historic Stephens Adobe Home and Ranch and the new Historic Oakdale Ranch Event Center

*The original adobe outbuilding became this beautiful home.*

*Photo courtesy of John D. Stephens, Jr. family, current owners.*



*Pictured above: new event center pond with historic ranch and large sheep barn beyond it, and the same barn is seen below, currently owned by John Foster, who uses it as a part of his*

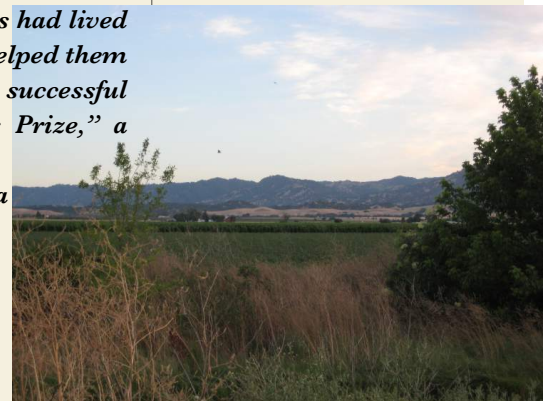
**BZ-Bee Honey Bee operation.**

“John D. Stephens, Jr., is recognized for owning and operating the oldest farm held by one family in Region V since 1852,” reads the certificate from the California Farm Bureau Federation in 1975. The farm/ranch is known as the second oldest working ranch in Yolo County to be owned and operated continuously by the same family. John inherited the approximately 400 acre farm/ranch just outside Esparto on Highway 16, and continues to farm with his daughter Marcy, son Brent and daughter-in-law Kim (Conley of Woodland), with whom he created and helps operate the new Historic Oakdale Ranch Event Center.

The name John D. Stephens will be familiar to local history buffs as one of the earliest European pioneers to the greater Capay Valley and the man who with his brother George, in 1868 chartered and became first president of the Bank of Woodland, at the time the “largest financial establishment of the Pacific Coast outside of San Francisco.” At that time, John D. moved from Esparto to Woodland, leaving the ranching to his brother George Dickson Stephens, with whom he had crossed the plains in 1849 in the company of mountaineers and trappers from Cooper County, Missouri. Having moved on from gold prospecting to livestock, the brothers had lived in hide tents on their new property until about 1850 when local “Indians” helped them build a 19’ by 40’ adobe granary to store their crops. After establishing a successful grain and livestock business--helped along by the purchase of “Worlds Prize,” a Southdown buck sheep for a whopping \$2000!--they set about bisecting the adobe outbuilding; creating a home by adding rooms, parlors, porches and a second story to accommodate their additions of wives and children.

The brothers had also organized the Cottonwood or Capay Ditch Company in 1859, which went on to eventually become the Clear Lake Water Company.

**Below: View from the ranch and event center**







*The Stephens names most familiar to locals today are descended from George D's 13 children: two with his first wife, Laura Wilcoxson, and following her death in 1875, Nannie Lucas, with whom he had 11 additional children. George's eldest son John L. retained the Oakdale Ranch home and passed it on to his son, John Dudley "Dud" Stephens, a former 3-term Yolo County Supervisor. His son John D. and grandson Brent still live on and farm there today. Also among George's 13 children are Fulton, Ben, [Peggy Wood's father; vol2], Frank, and Paul, and sister Sara, whose descendants still live, work and/or farm in the area, as well.*

*Today, John and Brent focus on farming English walnuts, while leasing out the remaining acres to local farmers for more diverse crops. They have also focused on wetland restoration of the land and the creation of a new event venue. Beginning in 2001, they looked at the unsightly "boneyard" typical on farms, where old tractors and harvesters go to rust and die, and at their continual flooding problems, especially during winters-springs like the one we had this year, and decided to do something about it. With the help of a contractor, they drew up a plan that included removal of the old farm machinery, digging a series of ponds, and restoring native habitats on their waterways. Brent and his mother Meredith (Karlstad) had also attended a pertinent seminar by John Anderson of UCD in the 1990s, and with Andersen's support they joined with Audubon Society in a cost-share program.*

*John Stephens was highly praised in articles published by the Audubon Society and Environmental Defense Fund in 2003 and 2005. According to an article by the EDF, posted on-line and updated May 2006, John Stephens, owner of the 550-acre Oakdale Ranch, originally approached Audubon California with the idea of restoring wildlife habitat on his land. Early on, all parties agreed that improving flood control and water conveyance along the one-mile stretch of Willow Slough where it crosses the ranch was also a priority. According to Audubon California, "Each winter the incised slough flooded fields and a nearby highway and required reshaping with heavy machinery. The maintenance was costly for Stephens, the local water district and the neighboring town of Madison. Thus the project was designed to achieve multiple benefits: improving wildlife habitat and also minimizing harmful flooding. In the second phase of the project, Willow Slough's banks were sloped back and rise gently above the channel, mimicking a natural floodplain. They have been re-vegetated with native plants such as purple needlegrass, deer grass, creeping wild rye, meadow barley, rushes, cottonwoods, willows, elderberry bushes, coyote bushes, live oak, valley oak and gray pine. "The grasses are growing well in the slough and on the lower*

*Historic Oakdale Ranch Event Center* above is perfect for parties of up to 200 from March through October with its half acre of lawns on 2 acres of ponds. Perfect for intimate weddings, class or family reunions and such, offering picnic areas and BBQ, fire pit, and shade gazebo, with running water and power--with the beautiful greater Capay Valley area as backdrop!



More information can be accessed on-line at:

EDF Environmental Defense Fund website; [www.edf.org/home.cfm](http://www.edf.org/home.cfm) "The Farmer as Conservationist is Key to Audubon California Program." and

[http://audubon-ca.org/LSP/yolo\\_slough](http://audubon-ca.org/LSP/yolo_slough); "Farm, Floods and Pheasant, Enhancing Sloughs in Yolo County."

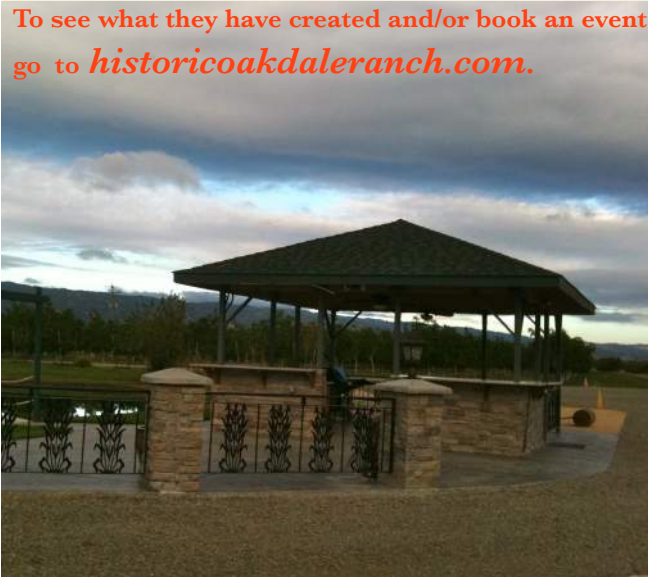
and

[www.historicoakdaleranch.com](http://www.historicoakdaleranch.com)



To see what they have created and/or book an event go to [historicoakdaleranch.com](http://historicoakdaleranch.com).

Pictured at left, the new gazebo area; directly below, a 2011 event: EHS Reunion for classes of 1970s-1990s.



benches, and Audubon California keeps tweaking the planting mix based on our observation and experience," says Stephens. "This makes for a better project all around."

One of the features of this process that delighted the Stephens family was their cooperation with The Center for Land-Based Learning's SLEWS program, which brought high school students from Yolo and Sacramento counties to assist in a hands-on educational experience, planting over 500 native tree and shrub starts and 20,000 native grass plugs and cuttings, sedges and rushes at waterline, and installation of irrigation and plant survival monitoring. This adventure has been a win-win for the family and the community! With the flood protection in tact, the wildlife thriving and the ranch being reinvigorated, the family began to focus on bringing the Historic Oakdale Ranch Event Center to life. By using native grasses and hedges as a theme, the intimate space looking out to the Capay Hills was born.



Pictured: John D. Stephens, Jr. with his new and old farm equipment. Some of the farming antiques are now on display in the event center area

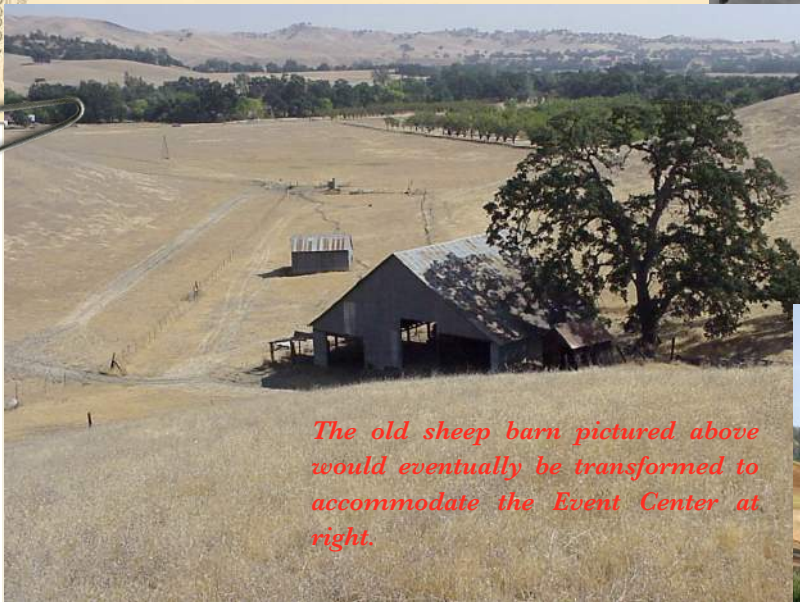






97. ***“Taber’s Corner” on Highway 16 in the Capay Valley: 5th-6th generation Tabers and Taber Ranch Vineyards & Event Center.***

Aerial black-n-white photo below shows Hwy 16 curving (seen at top left) at “Tabers’ Corner,” and below it is the historic ranch where the ***Taber Ranch Vineyards & Event Center*** now attracts visitors from all over the world.

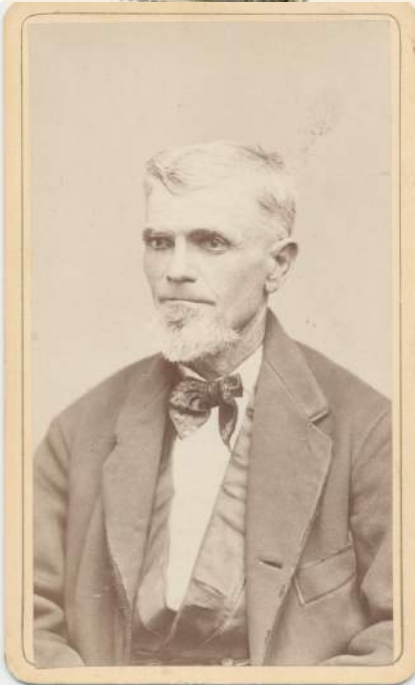


*The old sheep barn pictured above would eventually be transformed to accommodate the Event Center at right.*



***The founders of the local Taber-related families are Lorenzo and Eveline (Painter) Taber.*** In 1852, Lorenzo and Eveline crossed the plains with an ox team, bringing three small children, Emma, George and Flora; and their maternal grandfather, former wheelwright and ex-Virginia senator, Robert Painter. Trying different areas led them to Oregon for some years, and there another child, Harmon, was born in 1856. Returning to California, another child was born in the Clarksburg area in 1864, Loren Harvey. Eventually settling in the Capay Valley in 1867, he bought the east half of Lot I of the Arnold and Gillig Subdivision, and with several in-laws, moved to the home built by the Goodales from whom they had bought 343 acres, through which flowed Salt Creek. In order to do this, Lorenzo incurred a heavy debt--even though the price was \$15 per acre. He diligently set about clearing the land of manzanita, holly and chaparral, and dug an ever-widening channel off the Salt Creek to accommodate his wheat and barley. Unfortunately, Lorenzo had only 11 years

Above, the historic Taber sheep barn is now the heart of the ***Taber Ranch Vineyards and Event Center***. Located on a 500-acre ranch in the Capay Valley, it is available from April through October and can accommodate 60-300 guests for weddings, anniversaries, and other celebrations, as well as local fund-raisers. Farming is still very much a part of the whole operation and offers a unique setting to visitors.



Lorenzo Taber



Eveline (Painter) Taber



Their children, from clockwise from back left:  
Loren H., George W., Harmon J., Flora and Emma

**Continued from page 13:**

here before his untimely death--leaving a heavy debt to his industrious family. After his death, his sons purchased the west half of Lot I to complete a flat-iron shaped piece where they would raise families who are still represented in the area today.

The descendants of one son, Loren H. Taber, remained on the original east side, which he was able to add to by buying a parcel next to his bachelor brother, George Washington Taber. In 1882 he wed Catherine (Cave) Harley, who was from Yolo County, daughter of Jesse H. Cave, a 1849 pioneer to California. Other descendants, of Harmon Jay, settled on the western piece--including the current location of today's event center. Emma married LL Walton and moved to Hanford, California, but Flora married A. Appleby and lived in Esparto. *[The foregoing, according to Loren H. Taber heir, Robert Taber, 2011; **History of the State of California**, 1906; and Ada Merhoff's **Capay Valley, the Land and the People**, 1986--see Works Cited.]*

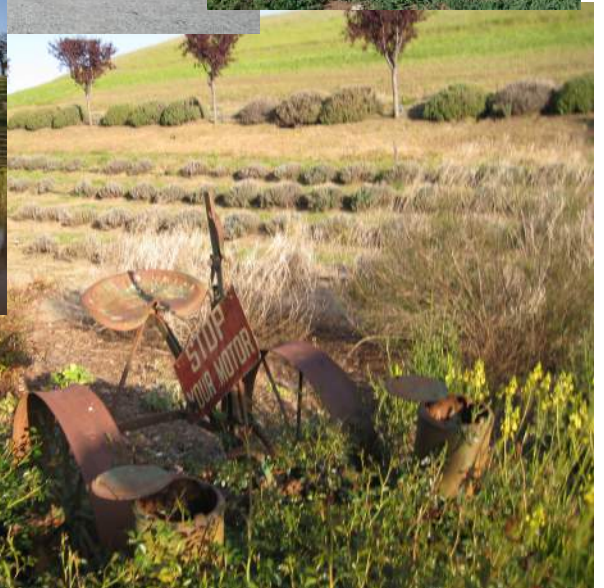
Harmon Ray Taber, Jr., who has been working his family's farm since 1977, and his Capay Valley ancestors have been "growing a varied and changing array of crops [and stock] in the Capay Valley since 1867." Wheat, barley, sheep, and hogs, were joined by their first almond trees in 1890--some of these ancient trees still exist on the farm! Over the years, as the demand for almonds peaked and diminished, some of their trees were removed and then new orchards replanted--just like much of the rest of the Capay Valley's famous almond orchards. As is obvious from the title, they also have put in a vineyard and, since 2002, the Taber Ranch also grows olives for award-winning Extra Virgin Arbequina oil. In the next volume I will be doing more on vines (and Prohibition!) and olives--as part of our unique history and where we are today.



## Welcome to the Taber Ranch Vineyards & Event Center

A unique & secluded country setting surrounded by hillsides of lavender, vines, orchards, lawn area and koi-filled pond--and a hilltop plateau panoramic view of the breathtaking Capay Valley!!

*The "shuttles" include two vintage red Cadillac convertibles--very classy! Or stroll through the beautiful and whimsical 2.5 acre Walking garden.*



*Martin Armstrong--a Taber cousin and the event center owner--and his wife Dawn invite you to contact managers Jean & Kim Chevalier for the various packages &/or tour information at [kim@taberranch.com](mailto:kim@taberranch.com) or 530-908-2359.*



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 *characters* from our past--and our lives.



*When my interests turned to local farm practices and the history of grain harvest, I naturally called our old family friend Gene Rominger. He was gracious enough to let me scan many of his family's pictures and walk me through what they contained--as well as encouraging me to attend the 2011 BEST Show on my very hot July 3rd birthday! The Best Family tractor and harvester show was held out on the Wallace Ranch, not far from the Heidrick Ag History Center museum in Woodland--and well worth the eye-ball melting 2 hours I spent out there! I happily ran into locals Stan and Lela Holland, so I was thankfully guided through some of what I was seeing by actual farmers.*

*At left, Gene and others pose with a “new” Caterpillar tractor out on Tex Webb's place they leased at the end of County Road 26, in about 1953.*

*That local Caterpillar company was the product of a merger when Woodland's Dan Best joined with Holt out of Stockton, CA.*

*Below, photo taken by Dawn Rominger*

Herb Campbell, Gene Rominger, his father Charles Rominger, and A.B. Clark (not of the Capay Valley old-timer Clark family, but from Woodland. He was known for his dairy cow breed bulls, but also often drove truck for the Romingers at harvest time.) This promotional photo was taken by the Cat Tractor Company

*At left, Romingers' 1920-30s wooden Harris harvests barley in about 1940 at County Roads 19 and 87, pulled by their 1930s Allis-Chalmers. Barley was a more common grain in this area at that time; currently it is wheat, just as it was in the late 1800s.*

*At right, Gene Rominger poses with a BEST tractor at the Heidrick Museum 2001.*



*Photos courtesy of Gene Rominger and daughters Cris, Dawn and Carol*





*Above left, first cousins Gene, Ken and Joe Rominger pose with a wooden Harris Harvester they saw abandoned in Colusa County. While Gene's father was farmer Charles, Ken and Joe are sons of Gene's uncle Herman Rominger. Above right, a Rominger hay wagon in about 1940 hauls the straw left over after the harvest--mostly used then for livestock bedding and shelter. At that time, oat hay was also cut with the heads still on it for livestock feed--much to the delight of barn rats and other rodents. Because of this competition for grains in the barns, farmers and ranchers were not in the habit of killing *useful* snakes that took up residence in their barns--some, like my rancher-cowboy dad, Tom Monroe, even left the occasional rattle snake and learned how to work around it! We were taught as kids to open the barn door to let the sun shine in and then wait...the resident rattlers would get off the bales and grain sacks and hide in the shadows while we got what we came for and shut the door--whew! Gene shared a story of catching rattlers himself with a forked stick and his bare hands and then trading them to Arbuckle Hotel bartender Curly Williams for a cold beer after a hot day of harvesting. Why?! Of course, it reminded me of the stories my brothers, Tom and Bob, told of catching rattle snakes the same way with local *character* and life-long friend, Dudley Craig, on the old Craig place we all referred to as *Dudleyville* in Capay Valley, and then selling them to UCD for venom extraction. The three used to show up at our house with a burlap sack writhing with rattlers! Sheesh! You wonder how we survived our childhoods!*

**Local dry farmers tried wet crops like rice for a few years after the 1914 Capay Dam and canals brought water into the dry area, mostly north of Esparto and Southeast of Madison. But the cost of water rose and brought back *dry farming*--and then row crops, which use less water than rice.**

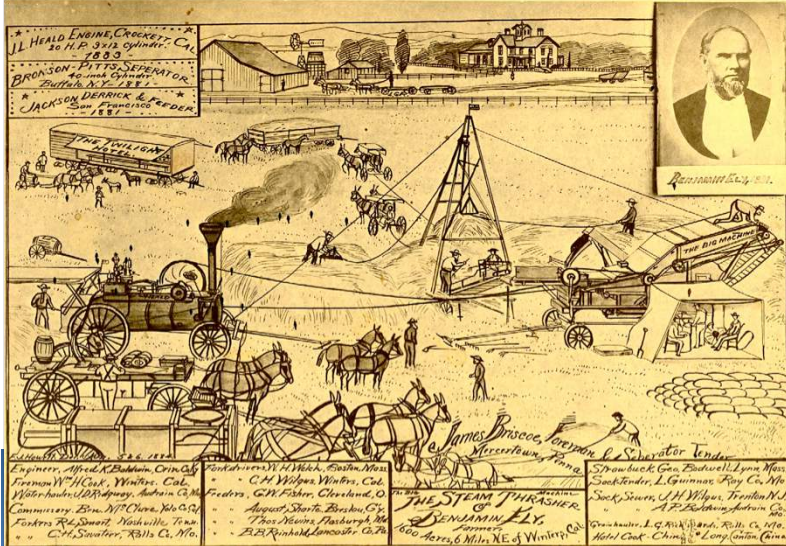


*Above 2 left pictures are of Romingers doing pretty typical--and often dangerous--steep hill harvest in about 1947; and in right 2 pictures, they altered their equipment to do rice harvest at Walt Summ's place about the same time.*





Summer in The Greater Capay Valley is filled with the sights and sounds of tractors and harvesters--not to mention the crop-dusting airplanes! Well, actually it is like that pretty much late-winter/early-spring through late fall--farmers don't rest much! And I thought my cowboy dad worked rough hours! So the "farming and harvest" in this area is a "character" in and of itself in many ways.



To the left, the drawing of the Steam Thrasher of Benjamin Ely of Winters, California, made in August 1884, was displayed by author Jack Alexander at the 2011 Best Show at the Wallace Ranch, Woodland, CA., to illustrate how his ~1880 portable steam engine, in above picture, was used. Manufactured in Vallejo by J.L. Heald, it was used in the 1880s on a 1000 acre ranch near Vacaville, owned by **William Butcher**.



Above and to the top right is an old wooden Holt harvester being pulled by 20-30 mules--didn't get close enough to make an actual count, as it was a lively and dusty display of actual grain harvesting! To the right is a BEST Manufactured red steam tractor--they are adding water for a display run!





*Heidrick Ag History Center's booth at BEST Show 2011*



Author Jack Alexander, retired aerospace engineer, now writes books on the history of tractors and harvesters, etc. His 3rd was a well-reviewed history of our local Daniel Best and Central Valley's Benjamin Holt and their various enterprises--leading to the creation of the ubiquitous "Cat" in: *The Caterpillar's Roots, 2010*. His latest is *The California Combined Harvester, 2011*, covering 1850s-1960s. Both available at Amazon.com.



## CAPAY VALLEY

FROM:

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

June 2011 Volume 3

*Heidrick Ag History Center* features the *Heidrick Antique Tractor* and the *Hays Antique Truck* Collections, both considered

the largest of their kind. Since 1997 the center exhibits farm implements, tractors and harvesting machinery from the late 1800s through mid-1900s. Open to the public Wed. thru Sun. 10-5, except major holidays. Go to: [aghistory.org](http://aghistory.org) or call 530-666-9700 or visit 962 Hays Lane in Woodland, CA.

