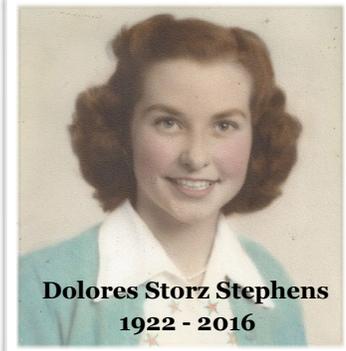


**Featuring
Water—a
great part of
what makes
Yolo County
and the Capay
Valley Special!**



Dolores Storz Stephens
1922 - 2016

We mourn her passing,
but are grateful for
having known her—and
her ever-present, warm
and wonderful Smile!

TGCVHS NEWSLETTER

**Historic Yolo County: from the
Mediterranean Climate to the Tule Swamps and the
Delta—to our Fertile Farm Communities—we take
pride in our Agricultural heritage!**

Researching and writing about this place has been quite an adventure—and has only increased my pride in being a 5th-generation Yolo County Descendant!

One of the great resources for my study has been the *Yolo County Archives*, including the *Yolo County Historic Resources Survey*, written in 1986 with partial funding under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 through the California Office of Historic Preservation. It is a great resource—though it is long overdue for an update! Sadly, many of the buildings listed in this survey have been demolished and many other historic resources should have moved from mere listing in this survey to actual listing in the National Register of Historic Places by now. Sometimes our focus on *all things agriculture* blurs our peripheral vision and we overlook our other resources—such as vestiges or our rich history. I am currently talking to the county about finding a grant to do an amended *Survey*—but in the meantime, I wanted to share some of the information from the one we have.

First, from the Survey language itself: *The governmental corollary to the Historical Society is the Yolo County Historical Advisory Committee. First appointed by the Board of Supervisors the YCHAC has been instrumental in establishing the County Archives which contains an unusually impressive stock of old County records, documents, maps and news papers. The YCHAC also has an informal role in reviewing demolition requests.*

The Yolo County Historic Survey, in large part, resulted from the committee's frustration and inability to have at their finger tips adequate historic information with which to act upon demolition requests for historic properties. [Refer back to our last issue regarding the proposed demolition of the historic Rumsey Bridge—which is listed in this survey!]



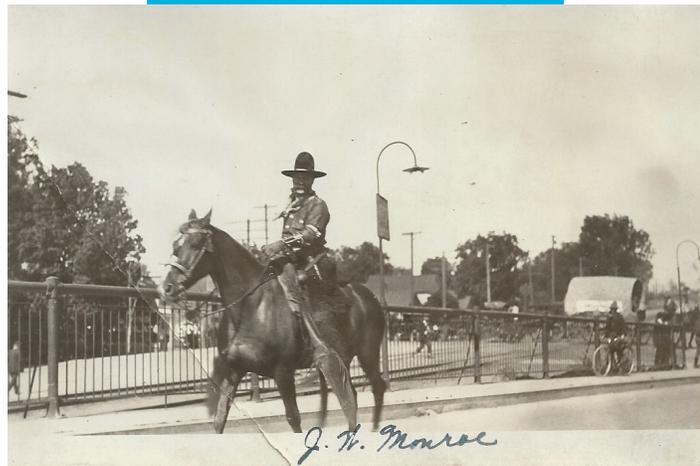
Above, as new Yolo County Sheriff, James William Monroe helps celebrate the opening of the new I Street Bridge on Highway 16 between Sacramento and Yolo counties, who shared the expenses of this new bridge in 1911-1912. He led the inaugural parade--in his beaver-skin hat and full sheriff regalia! Yolo County Sheriff from 1911 to 1938, Sunny Jim had a very strong sense of history—and theatrics!

On June 19, 1984, the YCHAC asked the Yolo County Board of Supervisors to conduct a comprehensive study of the historic resources found in the County and to actively pursue grant funding...It was determined by the Committee that the Survey was needed at this time because the list of 51 historic sites previously designated by the Board of Supervisors on July 6, 1970, was inadequate to deal with the growing development pressures occurring in the county.

Statement of Purpose: *The overall purpose of the survey was to see that significant historic resources could be identified...so that these resources could be preserved for the enjoyment of future generations...*

I included the foregoing to point out the importance we once put on the preservation of our Historic Resources—something we sometimes lose sight of, sadly. I travel across this country—as well as abroad—to research our shared history, and as I often say, *Every flyspeck town has a Historic center, a museum, a visitors center, many preserved historic homes and features—shame on us for letting ours go! We truly need to do more to preserve our history—not just in the county seat of Woodland, but across the county.*

From the Historic Resources Survey language we also see: *The Historic Survey more than demonstrated the wealth of historic properties*



within the county and the broad public support for their well-being...As a priority, the County should adopt an historic preservation ordinance for the purpose of designating and protecting properties on the Final Inventory and others which may be brought forward in the future with historic significance. At the time the Survey was done, the committee felt The existing policies which have been developed are limited in scope and do not reflect the number and caliber of historic properties as identified by the Historic Survey...and they recommended a system of Building Improvements be adopted to offer low-interest Rehabilitation Loans, House Painting for better preservation and maintenance of historic properties, and a better system of Historic Building Codes. They go on to encourage the restoration and preservation of our historic features to encourage Tourism, second only to agriculture in bringing commerce to California. In the section focusing in on Capay Valley, they included events such as Farm Tours and Fairs & Festivals, but also: The community of Esparto... because of their concentrations of interesting historic buildings provide the ideal opportunity to develop tourist-related activities...historical-minded citizens have long advocated a network of satellite museums around the County...

So, I am not alone in thinking we need to do more to preserve our heritage. I started *The Greater Capay Valley Historical Society* with that in mind: research and write about this special part of western Yolo County and try to preserve and celebrate its own unique history and culture as a special part of this county—one of the oldest in California.

OK, having said that, let me get back to some information from the *Survey* regarding the history of our water and farming—and how it ties into the water, farming and culture of Capay Valley:



In prior issues of this Newsletter, I mentioned that Cache Creek actually qualifies as a *River*—as seen at left in March 2012, a rainy winter. And though we have a history of frequent years-long and severe droughts, this natural resource attracted farmers to the Capay Valley for centuries.

The Survey continues: *Perhaps the most dramatic changes in Yolo County in the early years of the 20th century occurred along the Sacramento River. Between 1911 and 1918 the Fremont and Sacramento Weirs, the Knights Landing Ridge Cut, the Yolo*

Bypass and hundreds of miles of levees were constructed as part of a massive project to control flooding in the Sacramento Valley. When the Causeway, a 3.5 mile-long bridge over the Yolo Bypass, was built in 1916, there was an all-year road across the tules for the first time, and automobiles and trucks began crossing the county in ever growing numbers.

Control of flooding and reclamation of lands near the river made possible the cultivation of thousands of acres of formerly swampy land...

Yolo County remained a predominantly rural area, with a few small towns scattered over its rich farmland...Woodland has become a thriving agribusiness and industrial center...Winters, Esparto, and the towns of Capay Valley...have remained small and basically rural...What the county will be...depends to a large extent upon how its agriculture, transportation facilities and communities adapt to the challenges...

And more to our personal interest: *The picturesque Capay Valley is located in the foothills of the Coast Range, extending for twenty miles from the south end of Cache Creek Canyon to the town of Capay and lying between the Rumsey Range on the west and the Capay Range on the east bordering Hungry Hollow. Cache Creek, the outlet from Clear Lake in Lake County, flows through a series of flats and canyons to run the length of the valley before crossing Yolo County toward the Sacramento River.*

Bridge building and highway improvements have facilitated travel through the Capay Valley over the years, while the earlier mountain roads have been abandoned. What is now a section of State Highway 16 was designated as a Yolo County Scenic Highway in 1974. And in the Cache Creek Canyon Regional Park above Rumsey, the natural beauty of that wilderness area is being preserved for future generations.

Which brings us back to why it is important to preserve our natural wonders and our extensive historic treasures—like the 1930 Rumsey Bridge over Cache Creek in the town of Rumsey, leading to the historic Rumsey Grade. Both are Yolo County owned and maintained and important to our community, county and state. [See the feature on Restoration of the Rumsey Bridge in the last issue of this 2016 Newsletter; and articles on the Bridges of Capay Valley and on the Rumsey Grade in the book, *The History and Stories of the Capay Valley*, by Elizabeth Monroe and at greatercapayvalley.org]



Numerous bridges were built over Cache Creek beginning in the late 1890s—often washed out by floods—but a flurry of bridge building happened between 1911 and the 1940s. Few remain, but many of these were designed by Yolo County's own architect-engineer-surveyor, Asa Proctor, and are unique and rare—such as our own 1930 Rumsey Bridge seen at left on CR41 spanning Cache Creek, and its sister bridge on CR 95A, the 1923 Stephenson Bridge spanning Putah Creek between Yolo and Solano Counties.

Historic Ditches:

I wrote a bit about the Rumsey Ditch and the Moore Dam in the last issue and promised to go into the history of the many early attempts to divert Cache Creek water for farming. From the Historic Survey we get: “Agriculture was introduced here with the cultivation of a small wheat crop” in the 1840s. In 1842 William Gordon established a home north of Cache Creek and later sold his water rights to James Moore in 1856, which “led to the development of the county’s first irrigation dam and ditch system.” Later settlers upstream chose to divert water from Cache Creek for their own use and ran into legal battles with Moore, since his claim included all the water of the creek. To read a full article by Will Baker on this, go to our website greatercapayvalley.org where it is posted. But for the highlights on one such “ditch” that is still with us today, here are interesting excerpts:

Historical Background of the Rumsey Ditch

By Will Baker

The Capay Valley is home to one of California’s smallest irrigation units, the “Rumsey Ditch,” diverted from Cache Creek. This (largely) unlined canal currently runs from just north of Rumsey to a point past County Road 42b, a distance of about two and a half miles. For over 140 years local farmers have maintained this system, which runs through various culverts and siphons to a final drain back into Cache Creek.

The Rumsey Ditch might stand as a durable and fascinating microcosm of the intricate and colorful history of water in the Golden State. For example, the Ditch began with a dream that ended in court. An enterprising drover and Cavalry veteran named “Captain” Clint Rumsey purchased land at the north end of the Capay Valley in 1869, and soon began carving out the first version of the ditch with mules pulling a “Fresno” blade. In good years, the new ditch made water available to Rumsey and his neighbors in the dry seasons, permitting a much greater variety of crops. Grapes, fruit, oranges, and corn flourished, so the pioneers envisaged rapid settlement, a rail line, and the founding of prosperous towns.

Eventually, they were correct in that other farmer-settlers followed them and the railroad completed depots all along the Capay Valley to Rumsey by 1888.

In the 1920’s The Clear Lake Water company took over the dam and water rights and operated the system for 50 years. In the course of these transfers, water users on the original course of the Rumsey Ditch affirmed what amounts to a riparian right to Cache Creek water (since

Captain Rumsey's original contract predates California water laws). The status of users on the "lower" or "Guinda" extension remained uncertain...hydrologists label Cache Creek a "short, flashy, episodic stream," which means it is vulnerable to sudden and extreme flood or drought. Many local farmers have lost acres to gouging winter torrents. In the 1940's high water packed the first half-mile of the ditch with silt, and three farmers – Hayden Janes, Harry Jones, and Benny Lloyd – had to pledge their farms to secure the loans needed for dredging it out again. In 1996 members of the Rumsey Water Users needed a special assessment and \$250,000 in grants in order to repair the damage from the winter flood...One of the proposed cures for this condition could be worse than the original disorder. Several times State or Federal agencies have developed plans to dam Cache Creek near or even in the Capay Valley. In a project proposed in the 1950's, Rumsey and Guinda would have disappeared under a hundred feet of water. Later, dams were proposed for Wilson Valley and the gorge on the north end of Blue Ridge...Yet the Rumsey Ditch survives. A small miracle. Three or four steps wide, perhaps three feet deep, overgrown with poison oak, willow, tule, fig, wild rose and grape, maintained largely by hand labor—saw, shovel, pitchfork, machete, and loppers—it has delivered water to crops for six generations. It has gotten longer and shorter, wider and narrower over its 140-year history, and taken on several names, some printable. Floods and droughts have caved in or seared its banks, but very rarely has it run dry.

To what is this extraordinary endurance due? The hard work and dedication of a handful of small – very small – farmers, who understand that water is a precious common resource, whose renewal is a shared responsibility.

Another early Ditch off of Cache Creek

According to historian Bancroft, in 1859 early pioneer-settler John Dickson Stephens—along with his brother George D., and others—“organized the Capay Ditch company, of which he was appointed president, for the purpose of conveying the water from Cache Creek canon to the valley, whereupon a preliminary survey was made, though actual work was not begun until the dry season of 1864. During that year several miles of ditch were constructed, and a few years afterward the canal was sunk to a level with the bed of the creek at its headwaters; and since that time water has been used by the people for irrigation. It is about ten miles in length, terminating near the town of Madison.”

Preserving our other Historic Treasures:

Action Ideas from the Historic Resources Survey—yet to be acted upon: *Study funding sources and approaches to developing tour brochures and programs featuring historic buildings; Conduct feasibility analysis on establishing satellite museums that would be self-sustaining commercial ventures contributing to the economic enhancement of the County; and to Preserve older historic buildings ...less economically and functionally viable...are sometimes best held in the hands of a non-profit organization who has the special interest and ability to sustain their longevity. I am thinking of our one remaining example of the historic wooden school houses that used to dot the Capay Valley—the Canon School. As it sits on private land—easily seen by visitors to the Capay Valley on our Scenic Highway 16—the owners have spent private funds to restore damage from fallen tree limbs and frequent vandalism. It is an already registered Historic Property and deserves county support in its preservation. As the Survey points out: Equivalent organizations exist for the conversation of environmentally sensitive lands...elsewhere in the state and around the County, non-profit preservation organizations hold historic properties on an interim or long-term basis, of which the National Trust for Historic Preservation is a prime example. Though no such group presently exists in Yolo County or the region...many properties...exist in rural areas which*

warrant special protection and financial assistance. My hope is to continue to pursue such avenues with the county to preserve what few historic treasures we still have.

— Canon School — future museum?!?!?



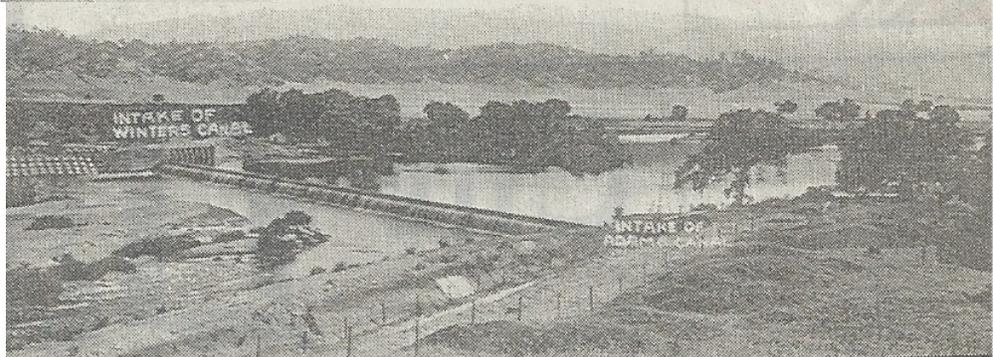
Also from the Historic Resources Survey language: *A drive through Yolo County is truly a drive through history. Older and historic houses are more the rule than the exception. Independent farms occur continuously from one end of the county to the other. Depending on the season, grain, tomatoes [it said sugar beets, but now it would say a vast array of crops,*

often organic]...color the endless fields...and distances are wide between farms and towns. Little topography is present anywhere in the county except on the western edge where the rugged Blue Ridge mountains define the Yolo-Napa County line and the lower range of mountains, the Rumsey Hills define the Capay Valley.

The majority of the 1,034 square miles of Yolo County's landscape has been a fertile farming area since the 1850s...The rural farmland scenery which is fast becoming a diminishing resource in other parts of California still exists in Yolo County. This coupled with the rich array of historic buildings—and bridges!—makes the county unique among other comparable rural communities.



Undated newspaper clippings submitted by subscriber Faye Mast Brannan: Above is Adams Canal on Duncan-Monroe Ranch; Construction of Capay Dam c. 1912; Capay Dam showing canals



**From: TGCVHS
PO Box 442, Esparto, CA 95627**

TO:

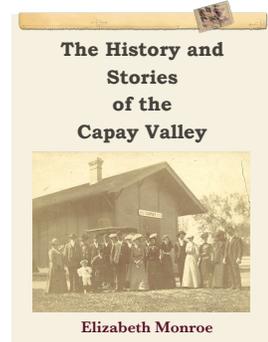
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Send enclosed form w check today!

In next newsletter, look for more on the pioneer Stephens Family—and others!

Don't forget to contact us for a copy of the new 440-page hardcover book! Check it out on greatercapayvalley.org or if you are a member-subscriber, your discounted rate is \$150— \$50 off the \$200 Retail price! Send a request and check to TGCVHS at the address above—and how you want the author to sign it!

To watch a Memorial video of Dolores Storz Stephens, go to [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com) & the site under [betsy353](#); or go to our FaceBook page: [The Greater Capay Valley Historical Society](#).



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