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greatercapayvalley.org

Farming in Yolo County

WHAT'S OLD AND
WHAT'S NEW



REFUGES, CONSERVANCIES
IRRIGATION,
MULTICULTURAL FARMERS



JOHN HATANAKA

TGCVHS



Farmers Adapt

Whether it is Traditional or Organic or Sustainable—or something else—farmers adapt constantly to the weather and climate changes and to political or social demands—it’s what they do. This issue will look at this trend to adapt and innovate and to keep the “small farmers” in the business of feeding and clothing us—and much of the world.

In the photo above, taken in Hungry Hollow north of Capay in August 2019, Capay Organics branches out and joins long-time Durst Organics in an area that historically began as German dry farming and then moved to thirstier crops like alfalfa and orchards—and now, increasingly, organics.

The History of Farming in Hungry Hollow and Capay Valley is not unlike that of the rest of Yolo County: earlier settlers beginning about 1850 often came with a bit of gold dust in their jeans, looking for farmland. They found a Mexican Land Grant originally called *Rancho Canada de Capay* that was newly split up to sell off to what were now Californians in the newest state of the USA. After this initial flood of settlers, others followed, often looking for farmlands that offered what they were accustomed to: for German farmers the dry farming potential of the grain-rich flatlands they dubbed *Hungry Hollow* appealed; while the hilly grazing lands appealed to many of the highland Scots for their cattle and sheep; and the Mediterranean climate appealed to Italians and Greeks with their wine and olives, etc. Chinese workers came in the 1880s to build a railroad and stayed on to build roads, cook in farmhouses, and provide truck garden staples and laundry services to the farmers and new townspeople—and an opium den, it turns out. Many, many Japanese farmers came at the turn of the century and settled from Rumsey to Winters to Woodland and beyond—but unable to own land, both Asian groups initially leased land from earlier settlers. By the turn of the century the Chinese were gone from Capay Valley, and by 1942 the Japanese and their American-born children were forced to leave, most never returning to Capay Valley, but some fewer returned to farm lands from east of Esparto to Woodland and Winters—mostly starting over from nothing. One of the earliest blacks in Yolo County was Basil Campbell, bought out of slavery in Missouri and brought to the new free state, where he was able to become a wealthy landowner in the Hungry Hollow area and this led to many others arriving after the Civil War and their freedom—the earliest either knowing Basil or of him—and receiving help and encouragement from him. Many would settle in the Capay Valley where the annual *Black History - Multicultural Celebration* is now so popular it has a standing room only crowd from beyond the valley on the second Saturday each February at the historic Guinda Grange Hall. There were, of course, still Native Mexican Californios and Spanish and Portuguese and Philipinos and Mexican immigrant farmworkers—so many of these farming or working on farms—and adapting. And adapting more than any of them were the 8000+ year natives to the area, the Hill Patwin tribe.

Irrigation by Hungry Hollow Canal



Spun off of the historic Adams Ditch—which was spun off of the Capay Dam when they were both built in about 1914—Hungry Hollow farmers tap in and divert and, when they have overflow, re-route the waters of Cache Creek through Hungry Hollow.

This newsletter and the next, both focused on farming, will cover current practices and future farmers and other related topics—including quail and other things related to farming this area. It will also look at the very multicultural make up of this farming area—a fact we celebrate every year with the Black History-Multicultural Celebration in Guinda the second Saturday every February.

I have finally scored a long-sought interview with local farmer and war hero John Hatanaka! Born in Capay to Japanese nationals—called *Issei* [*E-say*]*—*in 1918, John was an American citizen by birth, but after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941, he and his family were *relocated* from the valley and after the war returned to the Esparto area to resume farming. I knew Mr. Hatanaka and his wife Toy growing up in the Esparto area—attending Esparto High School with their sons—but had never heard his war nor *internment* stories. Not only did he come from a generation of Vets who did not talk much about their war experiences, but the internment of Japanese Americans did not exist in our history books before the 1970s! Fortunately, with time, their stories have come out—not only as novels and memoirs, but now appear in history texts in American schools.

Additionally, the heroics of Japanese American soldiers have finally been recognized and honored. In 2011 John and two other Yolo County Japanese Americans were thus honored: "...members of the 442nd from Woodland and Esparto will be honored Wednesday with the presentation of Special Congressional Recognition Awards by Congressman Wally Herger. They are George Yoshio Nakamura, age 93, Yorio Aoki, 91, and John Hatanaka, 92," according to an article in the Daily Democrat. All three were members of the 442nd Regimental Combat team—with a 93% casualty rate—in the US Army. The only one alive today is 100-year-old John Hatanaka, recently also honored by the French for his help liberating them from the Nazis—we can now call him *Monsieur* Hatanaka, he jokes.

While I awaited family to set up an interview with Mr. Hatanaka, I did some research to find George Yoshio Nakamura: who turns out to be one of the Nakamura Brothers of the furniture store by the same name still in business on Main Street, Woodland, CA. In recent conversation with a descendent, when I introduced myself as Betsy Monroe, niece of former sheriff Forrest D. Monroe, I was delighted to hear that Sheriff Forrest Monroe was a "hero to the family" for sending deputies to help board up and keep safe their family business after the bombing of Pearl Harbor and during the family's evacuation and internment. Forrest would have attended Woodland High School, just as the Nakamura brothers did, and though he was given the job of evacuating/*relocating* all people of Japanese descent from Yolo County after December 1942, he by all accounts did his best to keep them safe and to protect their businesses while they were *incarcerated*. Note: today, the term *interned* is outmoded as the attempt it was to soften the action—now, *internment* camps has been officially replaced with the more accurate term *concentration camps*. According to Wikipedia:

"The **internment of Japanese Americans** in the United States during World War II was the forced relocation and incarceration in concentration camps in the western interior of the country of between 110,000 and 120,000 people of **Japanese** ancestry, most of whom lived on the Pacific Coast. Sixty-two percent of the internees were United States citizens." Also, "The 442nd Regimental Combat Team, which fought in Europe, was formed from those Japanese Americans who agreed to serve. This unit is the most highly decorated U.S. military unit of its size and duration in U.S. military history. The 442nd's Nisei segregated field artillery battalion, then on detached service within the

U.S. Army in Bavaria, liberated at least one of the satellite labor camps of the Nazis' original Dachau concentration camp on April 29, 1945, and only days later, on May 2, halted a death march in southern Bavaria.” [wikipedia.org/wiki/internment_of_Japanese_Americans](https://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/internment_of_Japanese_Americans).

I am writing a much more thorough account of the incarceration and heroism for a much longer article—which will be posted on our website at greatercapayvalley.org—but my focus for this newsletter is farming in this area. And since many, many Yolo County farmers are of Japanese descent, I wanted to find out what brought them here. Which investigation took me back to the late 1880s in Japan and the fact that approximately 300,000 Japanese came to Hawaii and the western coast of America between 1886 and 1924. The short version is this: due to a recession in Japan following the fact that the Emperor grew tired of what he considered *archaic* and *Medieval* ways of the ruling Shogun and his Samurai class, in 1886 the southern Imperial clans attacked the northern clans and imprisoned the Shogun, displacing thousands of his followers, many of whom left for a better opportunity in the farms of America. While impoverished and displaced Cantonese Chinese similarly came for the gold and stayed to build the railroads, etc.—some of whom settled in Yolo County and will be covered more thoroughly in a future newsletter—the later Japanese immigrants came mostly for farming opportunities.

Initially, only men were allowed to enter the US from Japan, and these *Issei*—or first generation farmers—were not allowed to own land. Later, they were able to either send for their wives, or to marry by *arrangement* and to bring those new wives—sometimes called *picture-brides*. But only their offspring, called *Nisei* or second generation—and by birth, American citizens—were able to *buy* land. As an example of this I chose Roy Hatanaka of Rumsey. Born in Rumsey to Issei parents, Roy was able to *own* land and the *Rumsey Farm Company* corporation was formed, with shares *owned* by Roy and others in his family. In 1942 Roy—who was now a 22 year old American citizen—*owned* several acres of mostly orchards, land that was bought beginning in 1920 at Roy’s American birth—and presumably placed in his name. I wrote in an article in my book *The History and Stories of the Capay Valley* about this family and the heroic efforts of their neighbor and friend Benny Lloyd, who kept their farms going and safe, setting aside half of the farming profits he made farming their lands during the war years, and handing it back to Roy and his family after the war. [If interested, see Journal #16 posted on our website for the full article on pages 10-13.]

Rumsey School students and teacher in 1923—little Benny Lloyd in row 2 at far left joins many Japanese- and African-American students in a very multicultural student body.



[*Tsutsumi and Monji are the surnames of the Japanese American students in this photo—no Hatanakas, here, who were too young for the 1923 photo.*]

Yolo County — a River Runs Through it

Well, two major creeks, actually, but Cache Creek, as we call it, by any definition could have been called a *River*—and above the Capay Dam in spring, it still looks and acts like one! It is officially now designated “wild and scenic” in that area.

Because of the rich soil and these waterways, farming has been fruitful in this county. These two major creeks run through the county on the south and north sides: Putah and Cache Creeks. They have historically both been diverted and dammed in various locations; irrigation canals have been built; and conservation attempts have abounded. To look more closely at this activity I will focus on just the Cache Creek. [If interested in more in-depth articles on both creeks and their dams, see Journals #2 & 13 on our website: greatercapayvalley.org]

As a brief historical review from an earlier article that appears in Journal volume 2, “When, in 1847, the northern seven and one-half leagues of the Rancho Canada de Capay grant was conveyed to Jasper O’Farrell, basically the Capay Valley as we know it, a *land rush* of European pioneers began in earnest—including some important speculators, like John Gillig and Sy and John Arnold. On August 11, 1850, the Arnold brothers made the first commercial subdivision in the region and sold off some 5,500 acres to nine different parties for a handsome profit, according to historian Douglas Nareau’s *Historic Land Uses in the Esparto Judicial Township* [available on Sac State’s website as a Masters Thesis].

Then, in 1855, David Quincy Adams, looking for a better feed for his livestock, imported the first alfalfa into the area—and possibly the state. This alfalfa, known as Chilean Alfalfa, is believed to have come to the Capay Valley area from Chile, where it had been imported from Switzerland and was therefore known as Lucern Alfalfa. This is significant in that alfalfa requires abundant water—so it required a means of irrigation.

In 1856, the first agricultural ditch in the area was constructed about three miles northeast of Madison on Gordon’s Ranch. This canal was constructed by James Moore and led to other ditches in the area--the most significant being the Adams Ditch in the southern Capay Valley. The Adams Ditch was used to irrigate 150 acres of alfalfa and forty acres of garden crops, and was part of a larger system completed around 1870, which included the Adams Dam, forerunner of the present Capay Dam. [see Journal #2] Moore’s Dam will be covered in the next Newsletter.

Inspired by possibilities, by 1858 land speculators Arnold and Gillig had purchased 13,760 acres in Capay Valley and began to subdivide the land into parcels of 200 to 3800 acres. Gillig planted grain, grapevines, and fruit trees northwest of Langville [the present community of Capay], and established the county's first winery in 1860. Other speculators, Rhodes and Pratt, each took title to 6800 acres in the northern valley and began to sell parcels to settlers. Scattered ranches and tiny settlements developed along the valley—and throughout Yolo County, thanks to dams and canals from Cache and Putah Creeks.

Many crops were tried, including vines, cotton, rice, tobacco and more, but when the railroad was planned from Vacaville to the town of Winters and then up to Rumsey in the 1870-80s, the owners encouraged orchard crops: fruit and nut trees were planted, attracting Greek and Italian and Japanese farmers to the area. By the turn of the century, many of these crops failed due to drought and floods, but those that succeeded were mediterranean in nature: Almonds, Olives, and Vines, especially, as they were well-suited to the creek valleys; as well as grains and livestock such as cattle, sheep and hogs in the dry flats and hills. Those farmers and ranchers that stayed and succeeded continued to adapt—and many of their descendants do so today.



Whether it is switching to drip to conserve water, more sustainable practices to reduce chemicals, or organic farming, or removal of non-native invasive weeds, groups like Cache Creek Conservancy; Yolo County Flood Control and Water Conservation District; the Water Resources Association; and the Farm Bureau; and UC Davis work with farmers to adapt, adapt, adapt.

At left: the then-new Adams Canal c1913, running from the then-new Capay Dam, cutting through the Duncan Ranch and on to Hungry Hollow farms.

Yolo County is roughly 1034 square miles “largely dedicated to the profitable growing of fruits and vegetables, the logical location for ‘the brains of California agriculture,’ [referring perhaps to UC Davis, originally the *Farm School* of UC Berkeley?] and once the bailiwick of a fearless, revered Sheriff nicknamed ‘Sunny Jim,’” according to Richard Demorest of the *San Francisco Chronicle* in December 1952 [OK, I had to include that last bit about James William Monroe, Yolo County Sheriff for 28 consecutive years, as he is my grandfather. Yolo County did not toot its own horn, but we were important enough to make the SF Chronicle—even our popular *wildwest* sheriff Sunny Jim Monroe, 1911-1938.] And today we can certainly call ourselves the *Farm* to the Fork of the Sacramento region.

But farming is hard work and factory/corporate farms make it even more difficult for smaller farmers to compete and survive. So these ever-adapting farmers look to groups like the still-viable Future Farmers of America, FFA [more on them in the next Newsletter], to train not only in farm practices but good



business, education and leadership skills. And some farmers offer apprenticeship programs on their farms and co-operative opportunities.

Left: a Park north of the town of Capay, just north of the Capay Bridge—required from the gravel company in order to operate; once owned by Wyatt Godfrey Duncan.

WELL WORN TRAILS.

bara, and turned the land which was so well adapted to the raising of Jacqueminots and La Marcs, to the prosaic task of bringing forth great crops of fruit and grain.

From one end of the beautiful Capay Valley—from Esparto to Rumsey we did not see a rose bush, although there were plenty of wild flowers. Neither did we see one rod of land that was capable of cultivation running to waste.

extend down thro that can never we a sky that is as s sky of southern F under that sky an of the encircling r is only 24 miles lon —everything is p Everything save one thing that me throughout many p



Above: 1880s photo of Capay Valley before the orchards went in near Rumsey.



ON THE RANCHERIA, NEAR RUMSEYS.

Text covered from photo of a page at left:

extend down through 20m feet of soil that can never wear out, and upward to a sky that is a soft and mellow as the sky of southern France? In that earth, under that sky and within the protection of the encircling mountains—the valley is only 24 miles long and from 3 and 4 broad—everything is possible. Everything save a mortgage, The one thing that most worries the tourist though many portions of the state is...

NOTE: the photo of the Rancheria near Rumsey is one of the Hill Patwin—today known by their own tribal name Yocha Dehe—who had an 8000 year history in the valley, but was moved to a rancheria near Rumsey and later to Brooks as the US federal government tried to accommodate pioneers.

The farmers,—they are all farmers according to the Eastern definition of the term, not ranchers as Californians understand the word—are not poor, for every one of them owns his own home, neither are they rich, for the average size of their farms do not exceed 80 acres. Yet they would not exchange their 20 and 40 acre farms for a township in New Hampshire or Missouri, for does it not

this seeming utter disregard of all classes for the future. There is no putting anything aside for the proverbial "rainy day." Ranch life must be modeled either after the ever present examples of the Spaniard or the English Country Gentry, regardless both of the changed conditions of times and of the absolute necessity of £, s. and p. The warm fertile earth is so generous here in Cali-



TYPICAL CAPAY VALLEY HOME. (E. F. HASWELL.)

fornia that its owner must be equally generous and the result is always the same. Nature tires out and the ranch passes into other hands. It is no use trying to live the life of a retired country gentleman until you have something to retire on. There are no costly ranch houses from one end of the Capay Valley to the other—not one.

In fact, one is struck with the utter disregard for show exhibited. The houses are small, neat, one-storied and possibly only temporary. Money is not laid out in walks, parks or flower gardens, yet there is an air of well being about them all. It is easy to see however, where the money and labor have been spent. It is on the land itself—on the great orchards of apricots, prunes, peaches, figs, pomegranates, pears, almonds, English walnuts, and on the school-houses that meet one at every turn.¹ You can

¹Governor H. H. Markham in his State report of 1893, states that the number of schools in Yolo County, which according to census of 1890, had a population of only

stand in the middle of the broad hard-packed road that traverses the valley from end to end and look to the right and left down aisles of fruit trees to the foothills on either side and not pick out a weed or brush; or across great fields of yellow grain that do not stop at the foothills, where a combined harvester and thresher and twenty mules are at work, without wondering whether it is "volunteer" or not. You soon discover that every farmer's first ambition is to own his own farm no matter how small, after which he may possibly indulge in a big

house, but more than likely he has his eye on the 40 acres that adjoin his. The very method by which most of the land owners of this fertile little valley have bought their land is conducive to this habit of thrift and economy.

A great company named after the valley bought 10,000 acres out of the 40,000 in the valley. They then resold and are still selling their acres so that the purchaser, if he is industrious, can buy without capital and make the land pay for itself. The only requirement is 6 per cent interest for the first five years, and that a reasonable proportion of the land so purchased be planted in fruit trees or vines. At the end of the five years the land will be in a position to much more than pay for itself, for the fruit trees will be bearing earlier than in any other portion of the State, so

12,684, was 78. School children between 5 and 17 years, 3,478, -more than one fourth of the entire population. School money, \$9,315.00.

OK, so that was a little Ag history—now, what is new in Ag? I constantly comb the news and talk to local farmers to see what is up—and try to share it with you.

In relation to how farmers are constantly *adapting*, I am most intrigued by:

1) Most scientists believe *Climate Change* is here and real—no matter how it was created—and are researching ways for farmers to adapt to it—so research money is all important; so why isn’t more finding its way to this field in California? Organizations like *CalCAN California Climate & Agriculture Network* are asking the same question. An article in June 2019, “California Falls Short on Climate Smart Farming Investments,” by Jeanne Merrill, Policy Director with the California Climate and Agriculture Network, explains the financial needs and results of programs throughout the state related to things like saving water, sequestering Carbon and Methane, and improving soil through sustainable practices—all of which takes money to support farmers who wish to move in this direction. These are not simply “farm subsidies,” they serve all of us in helping the farmers *adapt*. http://calclimateag.org/california-falls-short-on-climate-smart-farming-investments/?fbclid=IwAR1GvGcivm77YlNpNtFfyPIVoVsJ9O4Bu3Fu-e5sLm3Fvb7hCDu_s_lMyW8

2) “State Legislators and Staff Learn From Farmers Leading the Way on Climate Change,” July 28th, 2017 by Amy Winzer — smart government agencies listens to farmers who are adapting —on the same website as above: Calclimateag.org.

3) Experimentation with new crops to adapt to the climate: UCDavis often leads the way, of course. One example is *teff*

UC Davis researcher Gizaw Wolde inspects a test crop of the Ethiopian grain teff...US plant scientists are beginning to study the grain as a serious alternative crop. “Teff is grown and sold mainly as horse feed in the United States, when it is grown at all. But at a time when scientists worry that climate change will decimate the wheat, corn and rice that dominate Western diets, its hardy nature may give teff an edge. Advocates think teff could even be the next superfood; it has three times more iron and almost twice as much fiber as traditional grains, and a more complete suite of amino acids... California is the food basket of the United States, but it also faces serious challenges with water in the future, so we need to diversify the crops that we grow to beat the threat,” according to researchers: <https://www.latimes.com/business/story/2019-08-30/could-teff-ancient-african-grain-find-foothold-in-warming-california?>



fbclid=IwAR1qX88f2Bnvh792VITBpqcRgZFC2_c_JFznabZN4offxu1Gm2ab_QuWpMA

4) Grain farmers *a*float—but not in a good way! Read the article “How Climate Change in Iowa is Changing U.S. Politics” wherein a farmer explains it best: “The farmer...a bespectacled 49-year-old named Matt Russell, wants to talk about climate change. ‘Farmers and rural Americans, that’s who’s going to solve this,’ Russell says...as the two stroll accompanied by a bevy of cameras in front of his red barn. ‘We have the land for renewable energy, and we have the farming systems to sequester carbon.’”

<https://timedotcom.files.wordpress.com/2019/09/climate-change-iowa-farmers.jpg>



Photo at left: Gene Rominger of Yolo County harvesting in Hungry Hollow Hills on his *Cat*.



The Rominger family is still farming Yolo County and practicing some of the most sustainable and cutting edge methods. Visit: <https://plantingseedblog.cdffa.ca.gov/wordpress/?p=17278> and see page 11 of this newsletter.

5) Farm movement to Political movement: it’s campaign time, so many candidates have “put out similar proposals, from Booker’s pledge to provide the Department of Agriculture with tens of billions of dollars in conservation funding” to Bennet’s idea to create a new research agency to focus on climate solutions for farmers. “Candidates are not just showing up and walking through the state,” says Russell. “They’re sitting down and listening.” Here’s a *Concept*: listen to the farmers! [same website as above]

6) Forward thinking Jane Goodall says she: “started Roots & Shoots—a program in which kindergartners and university students alike choose projects to make the world a better place for animals, people and the environment—in 1991 when I realized how many had lost hope. It exists now in more than 50 countries, and many participants are working on climate-change-related issues...How is it possible that the most intellectual creature ever to walk the earth is destroying its only home? There has been a disconnect between our clever brains and our hearts.”

Northern California farmers win prestigious national conservation award: Rominger Brothers of Winters

Posted on February 22, 2019 by Office of Public Affairs <https://plantingseedsblog.cdfa.ca.gov/wordpress/?p=17278>

In a press release sent to the Winters Express, the NACD stated that Rominger Farms was recognized for their, "innovative conservation efforts" on their 6,500 acres of agricultural land outside of Winters. The NACD commended them on their commitment to improving soil health and efficient water use.

"Managing that many acres in an environmentally-sustainable way while maintaining productivity takes a commitment to long-term conservation planning, which makes Bruce and Rick worthy recipients of this prestigious award," the press release reads.

For the Rominger brothers, sustainability isn't an end-point, it's a constant process of growth and learning.

"We are to be more environmentally sustainable all the time," Bruce says. Currently Rominger Farms operations support a diverse array of crops, including tomatoes, wine grapes, rice, wheat, corn, safflower, alfalfa and oat hay. They have arranged tours for universities and government organizations to visit their operation and learn about their practices.

Discussing modern conservation farming practices, Bruce accounts for the immediate needs of farmers while simultaneously taking the long view. As he puts it, the two aren't necessarily at odds.

The farmer's first priority has to be staying in business, Bruce says. He points out that if he can't make a living farming he will be replaced, and that the next person to own the land might not be dedicated to conservation.

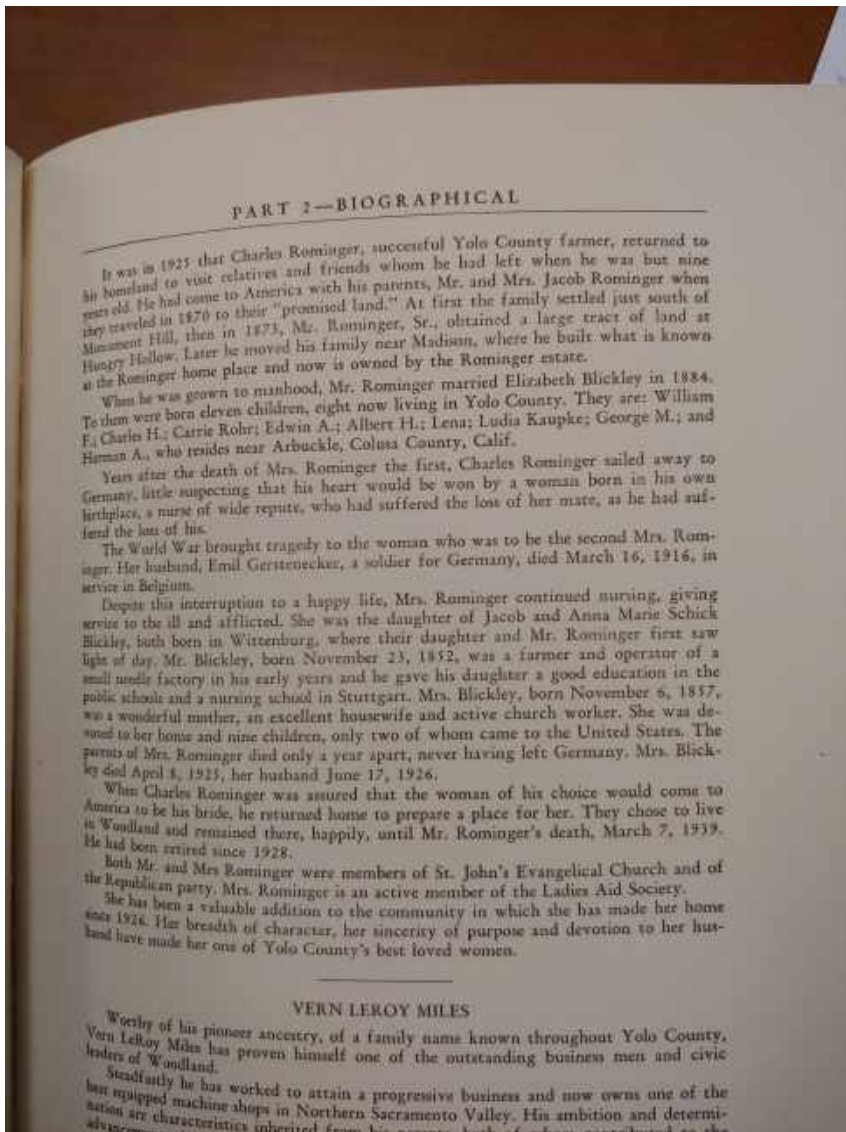
But the necessity to make a profit is tempered by Bruce's philosophy that people should be farming his lands 50, 100 even 500 years from now. He points to areas of Egypt and China that have been farmed successfully for thousands of years, while soil in the Central Valley has become depleted in under 200. Bruce believes that it is farmers' responsibility to find out what it will take to make that happen.

[the above excerpts were copied directly from the *California Department of Food and Agriculture* website article at [cdfa.ca.gov](https://www.cdfa.ca.gov)]

The next newsletters will feature Sustainable Farming practices, including those of the 8000-year residents of the Capay Valley in Yolo County: the *Hill Patwin*, [as opposed to the *River Patwin* who are of the area northeast of the Capay Valley, often referred to as the *Colusa* branch; both are of the greater Wintun Nation]. My interest in our own local branch is obvious and I want to delve more into their practice of sustainable farming—*then and now, an 8000 year tradition.*

Also in the next newsletters: the FFA and other organizations supporting future farmers; more on John Hatanaka, farmer and war hero—after the interview; the Oak trees of Yolo County—the *Yolo County Tree Foundation* looks to find the biggest and oldest Valley Oak in Yolo County while learning about the other oaks native to this area; quail; and historic experimental crops like Turkish Tobacco.

If you have not subscribed and this is a courtesy issue/reminder, please do so by sending a check for \$60 to TGCVHS at the address below—today! Don't miss out!



At left: Charles Rominger bio from *The History of Yolo County; 1940 edition*; courtesy of the Yolo County Archives

From: *The Greater Capay Valley Historical Society; 416 Lincoln Ave., Woodland, CA 95695*

TO: