

History of the Japanese in Capay Valley/Yolo County

Assembled for the annual Black History - Multicultural Day Celebration at the historic Guinda Grange Hall 2020 from the Newsletters published for The Greater Capay Valley Historical Society by author-publisher Elizabeth "Betsy" Monroe.



Rumsey School 1923: a very multicultural group: Several African Americans named Watkins and Hickerson; and the Japanese names are Tsutsumi and Monji; Hatanakas lived in Rumsey, but Roy and his brother were too young to appear in 1923. Benny Lloyd is center row left; he would grow up to help the Roy Hatanaka family when they were interned in 1942.

While many Japanese farmers came to Yolo County between the late 1800s and 1920s, I have focused on those who settled in the Capay Valley area of Yolo County. Many were orchardmen, so they chose the Capay Valley where the railroad owners encouraged nut and fruit trees; but after their 1942 removal, they did not return to the valley, but rather resettled between Esparto, Winters and Woodland and farmed row crops such as tomatoes and alfalfa, as well as orchards—like the Hatanakas, herein interviewed.



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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.*]



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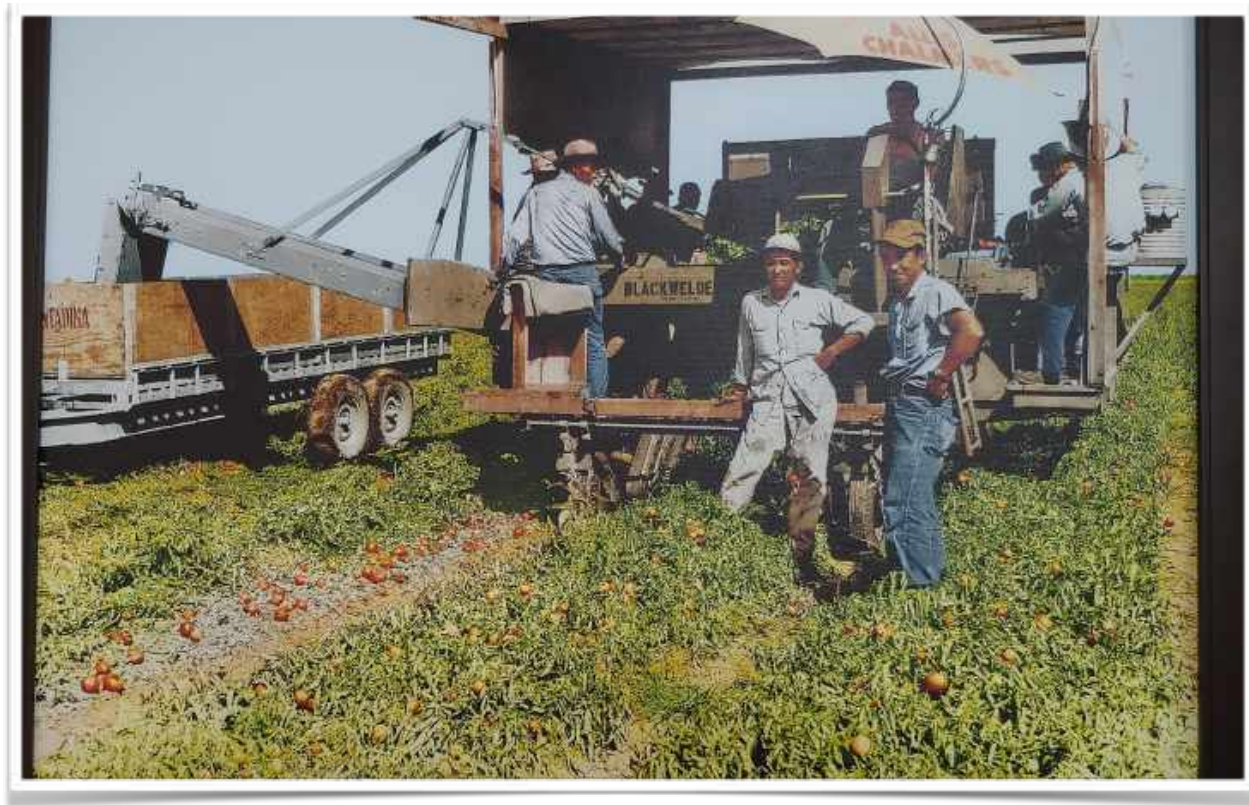


California Quail



JOHN HATANAKA

TGCVHS



Farmers Adapt

Whether it is Traditional or Organic or Sustainable, farmers adapt constantly to the weather and climate changes and to political or social demands—it's what they do. In some cases it is an adaptation to labor shortages, such as the end of the Bracero Program in 1962 and the resultant invention of tomato harvesters—offering us local kids summer jobs.

In the photo above, taken on John Hatanaka's farms south of Esparto in the 1960s, he stands at left with one of only 30 Blackwelder Tomato Harvesters ever created; built in Rio Vista with the help of UC Davis Ag research. These tomatoes are headed to Contadina in Woodland.

The History of Farming in Yolo County; Japanese American Farmers

I have finally scored a long-sought interview with local farmer and war hero John Hatanaka! Born in the town of Capay—population 50—to Japanese nationals, or *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 Capay Valley, and after the war he returned to the Esparto area to resume farming. I knew Mr. Hatanaka and his wife Toyoko Yamamoto—whom everyone affectionately called *Toy*—as I grew 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—and no one I knew ever talked about it. Fortunately, with time, their stories have come out—not only as novels and memoirs, but now appear in the history texts in American schools.

In 2011, John and two other Yolo County Japanese Americans were honored as “members of the 442nd with a *Special Congressional Recognition Award*, given by Congressman Wally Herger. George Yoshio Nakamura, age 93 at the time, was one of the *Nakamura Brothers* who own a furniture business by that name on Main Street Woodland since the 1930s; Woodland farmer Yorio Aoki, 91 at the time; and John Hatanaka, 92 at the time, 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, awarded numerous times for his service, including: member of the *100th Infantry Battalion - 442nd Regimental Combat Team Military Intelligence Service*, awarded in 2012 by Congresswoman Doris Matsui; and recently also honored by the French for his help liberating them from the Nazis—we can now call him *Monsieur Hatanaka*, he jokes. Actually, he is a *Chevalier de la Legion d’Honneur*.

According to Wikipedia: “between 110,000 and

Farmer and War Hero



120,000 people of **Japanese** ancestry, most of whom lived on the Pacific Coast, were *interned*—sixty-two percent of the internees were United States citizens." Ironically, almost none of the approximately 130,000 Japanese nationals or Japanese Americans living in Hawaii at the time were interned—which is claimed as proof that this action was based more on racism and mass hysteria. The very powerful Sugar Plantations refused, claiming that they “trusted these families”—and their farm labor was “essential” to Hawaii. In the research that took place only a few decades ago, it is revealed that some very powerful men in the military and politics pressured the president to intern *all of Japanese descent* living on the West Coast. One was since-dishonored Lt. General John L. DeWitt, who is documented as claiming, “A Jap’s a Jap. It makes no difference whether the Jap is a citizen or not.” Such pressure led to the internment of all: whether able-bodied or aged or infant or feeble, they were seen as a *potential risk*. Of course, this created a great labor shortage for farmers, and in 1942 the *Bracero Program* was started—but more on that in the next Newsletter.

As I learned from John and Toy, while they were sent to Amache War Relocation Center in Granada, CO, farmers like John were often given “essential work” outside the camps and he was able to leave the camp to farm nearby. He had registered for the draft while in Yolo County, CA, but with his mother and a new wife—and a child on the way—in the Amache Camp, he preferred to stay near them and farm in Colorado rather than enlist. Unfortunately for them, it was determined by the federal government that the state you registered in determined whether you would enter the service. So, unwillingly, he was drafted by the Yolo County Draft Board and served 2 years in the Army as part of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, which fought in Europe, mostly in Italy and France. “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...on detached service within the U.S. Army,” per [wikipedia.org/wiki/internment_of_Japanese_Americans](https://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/internment_of_Japanese_Americans). I asked John if he had regrets and he said, “No, because I survived intact and I got my revenge: I told the draft board I would outlive all of them—and I have!”



Toyoko and John Hatanaka; married in February 1942; interned 2 months later

Since my focus for this newsletter is farming in this area, and since many Yolo County farmers are of Japanese descent, I wanted to find out what brought them here originally. Many started arriving in the US in the late 1880s from Japan—and approximately 300,000 Japanese came to Hawaii and the western coast of America between 1886 and 1924—following a civil war between the Japanese Emperor and the ruling Shogun and his Samurai class in 1868, and then due to recessions in Japan. Many left for a better opportunity in the farms of America, and many settled in Yolo County—such as John’s father *Arthur* Hatanaka, who came in 1906 with a group of other men interested in farming. Of course, *Arthur* is his *American* name, given to him when he first arrived in the SF Bay Area and worked as a *houseboy*, where he learned to speak English. His name was actually Hisakichi Hatanaka. In 1918 he went back to his little village in Japan and took as his wife a woman he would have known there, previously. He and Uta Kimura moved to the small white house in Capay on the Craig farm on the banks of Cache Creek. Here, on December 21, 1918, local doctor Thornton Craig delivered John Tamotsu Hatanaka—named *John* for Doc Craig’s son who farmed for his father and



for whom Hisakichi labored. For fun, I located John’s birth as noted in Doc Craig’s diaries in the *Special Collections* at UCD’s Shields Library. We were both delighted to see this notation.

As seen in the 1928 photo to the left, John Hatanaka [front center] attended Capay School, as did his cousin Hideo Sagara [front right]. Of note: in 1942, Hideo chose the government option to move east and resettle, avoiding

possible internment. His farming partner, Fred Vannucci, helped him do so by advancing his shares in their Capay farming business. When Toy was released from the internment camp, she and toddler Nancy went to stay with the Sagaras in their “nice home” to await John’s release from the army. John was released to Chicago, IL, at his own request, for he had made friends in the army who offered him *a great deal* on a car if he came home to Chicago with them. He bought a car and drove it to Pueblo, Colorado, to pick up his wife and new daughter Nancy—who was born in Grand Junction, CO in 1944—for the return drive to Esparto, California. He returned to the Grant farm south of Esparto where he and Toy had started out together in 1942, and where he had worked even during high school in Esparto—as a farm laborer, supporting his mother and his brother. Because his father had died in 1934, his mother was forced to take his younger brother back to her village in Japan and leave him with family, while she returned by ship to SF in 1935. Times were rough in the 1930s, of course, so John was not able to attend college; he needed to work to support himself and his family. His younger brother, Mamoru, returned to CA in the 1940s, just in time to be interned with the family. On John’s return from Europe in 1946, he labored and put aside his money and began buying acreage nearby and eventually amassed a considerable farming operation—with no help from the US government: no GI bill, no discounted loans. Nothing. He claimed with pride, *I worked hard—and Toy worked even harder*. Interestingly, their address in the various census I looked up was Winters, so I had asked if they started out together in Winters—boy, did *that* get a response from John! *NO*, he never lived in Winters; there was a natural rivalry between the two communities: the Winters vs Esparto farmers. He hated that his address was actually in the Winters postal district—just across a county road/boundary from the Esparto postal district. At this, Toy added that they “lived in the Winters PO, the Esparto School District and the Woodland area code.” But John insisted he was *an Esparto Farmer*—period. He farmed with his brother Mamoru—whom everyone called *Mom*—and not far from him settled their cousin Hideo Sagara, who returned to farm in California after the war,

as did his brother, Masao—whom everyone called *Mas*—and many other *Nisei* American citizens. To this day, many of their descendants live in the area—some still farming.

Initially, only men were allowed to enter the US from Japan, and these *Issei*—or first generation Japanese—were not allowed to own land. Later, as they leased land to farm and went back for or sent for wives and had children, many put their businesses and land in the names of their American offspring. While Arthur had previously known his future-wife, Toyoko claimed that her mother, Sasue Sasaki, was a *picture-bride*, who married Usaku Yamamoto, sight unseen—20 years his junior; he was 50 and she 30 at Toyoko’s birth, delivered by midwife at 1410 4th Street, Sacramento, on January 1, 1925. John, Toy and Roy, et al, are *Nisei* [knee-say] second generation—and by birth, American citizens, so were able to *buy* land, as I wrote about Roy Hatanaka of Rumsey in the last issue. 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. [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. Roy and his family did not resettle in the Capay Valley, but moved to Marysville to farm. After 1942, there are no Japanese surnames on the photos of school children of Capay Valley. None. If interested, see Journal #16 posted on our website for the full article on pages 10-13.] **Thank you Nancy Hatanaka and Dawn Rominger-Hatanaka for making this interview possible! Thank you Toy and John!**

California Quail—alive and well in the area, though many of our bird species are threatened everywhere by *Climate Change*, farming practices, loss of habitat.

I asked our local bird man, hobby-ornithologist Jim Hiatt, to share with us some photos he has taken recently in Hungry Hollow and to share some of his knowledge and memories of growing up in the area with the many amazing birds of Capay Valley—as we refer to them in the book we created: *The Birds of Capay Valley*. Since the first edition sold out, we are adding to it for a second edition—which will be available, soon, on our website: greatercapayvalley.org.



As seen at left in the text *Birds of North America*, the bird Jim photographed in our area above is a perfect example of a male *California Quail*.

Jim writes: “There are lots of neat things about this bird, not the least of which is that it happens to be our State Bird—and a lovely choice. *Callipepla californica* is its species or *scientific name*, and is a member of the *Order Galliformes*, which it shares with chickens, turkeys, pheasants; and other *game birds* like grouse, bobwhite, chukars and so on. Its *Family* name is a challenge to pronounce--try *Odontophoridae* on for size.”



After the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December, 1941, the US government created a special census to locate the residence of all people of Japanese descent on the West Coast. These files can be researched at the newly renamed Shipley Walters Center for Yolo County Archives and Library Services at 226 Buckeye Street, Woodland; 530-666-8005

PRINCIPAL OCCUPANT OF LAND

1. Name John Hatanaka 2. Age 23
 3. Mail address Route 1, Box 264, Winters, California.
 4. Citizenship American
 5. Family relationship to owner of fee title None
 6. Family relationship to holder of interest less than fee None
 7. How long on this land 3 years
 8. How long in this vicinity 17 years
 9. Letter of what Japanese associations or other organizations
None

10. Japanese, other than occupant, who work on land.

Name	Relationship	Citizenship	Sex and Age
<u>Mamoru Hatanaka</u>	<u>Brother</u>	<u>American</u>	<u>male, 17</u>
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

11. Children of occupant not working on land.

Name	Present occupation	Citizenship	Sex and Age
<u>None</u>	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

ALIEN LAND LAW

1. Any reason in addition to above answers for believing Alien Land Law has been violated _____

C. C. McDonald
District Attorney of Yolo County.

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INFORMATION ON PARCELS ACQUIRED LAND

LAND
Map No. 1 and 2

1. Location 4 miles south of Eureka, California 2. Size 50 acres
 3. Legal description
S. 40 acres of the NE 1/4 of Section 15,
 Strip off the west side of the NW 1/4 of Section 14,
 W 1/2 of NE 1/4 of NW 1/4 of Section 15,
 All in Township 9 North, Range 1 West, N. D. R. & N.
 4. In vicinity of what strategic works None
 5. Nature of crops or use Figs and olives
 6. Number and nationality of laborers on land None outside of family.

OWNER OF FEE TITLE

1. Name Paul M. Grant 2. Nationality American
 3. Address Route 1, Box 264, Winters, California.
 4. If a corporation, name and nationality of controlling parties

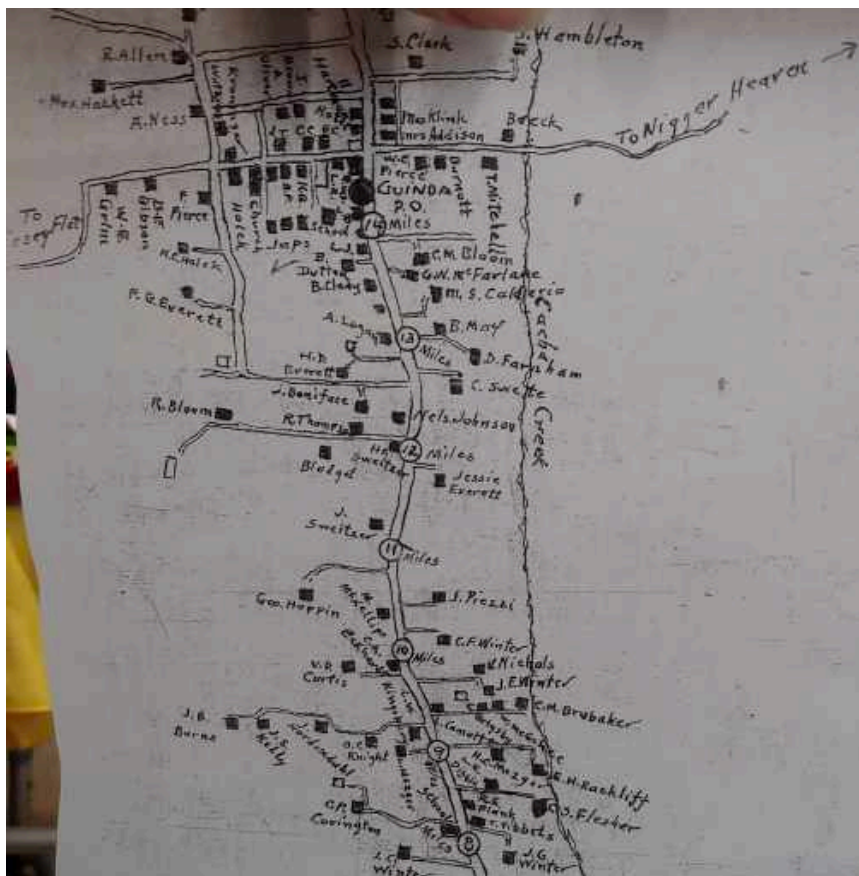
 5. Date title acquired _____

HOLDER OF ANY INTEREST IN LAND LESS THAN FEE

1. Name _____ 2. Age _____
 3. Mail address _____
 4. Citizenship _____ 5. Occupation _____
 6. Family relationship to owner of fee title _____
 7. If minor, guardian's (a) Name _____
 (b) Citizenship _____ (c) Address _____
 8. Nature of interest in land _____
 9. Date interest acquired _____

In these two forms we learn the address of John Hatanaka and where he worked in 1942. He and his family would be removed to an Internment Camp in Colorado in April 1942.

I am grateful to the staff at the Yolo County Archives—especially Heather Lanctot—and the Friends of the Yolo County Archives, and the family and friends of John and Toy Hatanaka for all their assistance and patience. And to John and Toy, what can I say? My heart is filled to overflowing from you opening your hearts and home to me for this labor-of-love. Gratefully yours, Betsy



This is a hand-drawn map from the Farm Bureau, shared with me by John Hatanaka, who was born in the town of Capay in 1918 and knew the people living there on these maps.

NOTES: In Capay, on Cache Street, the house now owned by David Woods was Wilbur Cline in 1936; and to the left is blank, but later the "Shorty" [and now daughter Gilda] Clark family; and to the left/west of that was the William [and Lizzie Duncan] Moore house, now burned down.

Along Main Street on the north side is the George Tandy Store/Bar—still standing as the oldest wooden store in Yolo County—and across from it are Dr. Lewis and in ol' Doc Thornton Craig's house is JM Craig, his son, a dentist. West of Capay, at about 2 miles on the creek side are C B Lines, W G Duncan, Elmer Wood: all married to Duncan girls or the son of Ben Franklin Duncan, who had lived on the other side until his death in the late 1800s; up to Woods, this land is now Capay Valley Organics.



NOTE: At about mile 3 miles on creek side is Robert and his mom Ruth Taber's house; and about mile 4 is Taber Corner and just beyond that is RO Armstrong. Several Nurse homes between 4 and 5; in Guinda at about mile 15 on the left is "Mrs.Hackett"—Roy and Bamma and family?; and across Hwy 16 is the road to the "Summit"/N***er Heaven; and to the left/south is road to Casey Flats. Hambletons are just beyond this on the Creek.