

Country Doctors often worked with other Doctors and nurse-midwives, such as Capay Valley's own Mary Gaither: nurse, mid-wife, care-giver.



*Above: Mary with her three sons, left to right: Leland, Elmer and Eddie, born and raised in Esparto by Mary and her husband Augustus.*

Many local histories and newspapers have covered Mary Gaither, so we happily have her biography--and her own narrative!

*Mary was born in May 4, 1865 in Boonville, Cooper County, Missouri to Willis and Marcia Brisco. Her mother died when Mary was 10 and Mary was taken in by a Dr. Evans to care for his only son. The good doctor decided Mary was a gifted nurse and placed her in training to that profession, nursing under his supervision for nine years.*

*Mary's husband Augustus Gaither had a sister and her husband living in California, Elijah and Sarah Jennings. Elijah was a half-brother of Basil*

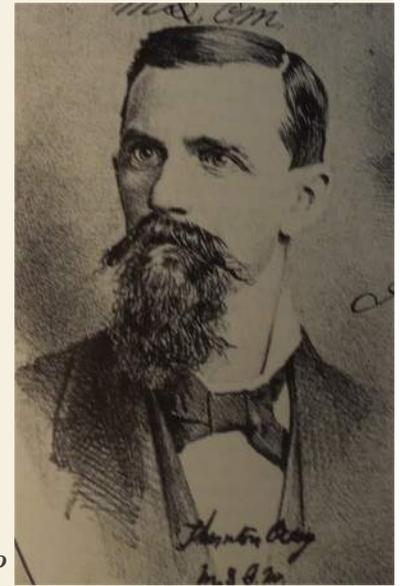


*Campbell, the largest Black land owner in Yolo County, and they both settled in the Dunnigan Hills-to-Fairview area. Through them, Mary and Gus came to California to find work in 1886. They began working out in Hungry Hollow on Jenning's land off what is now*

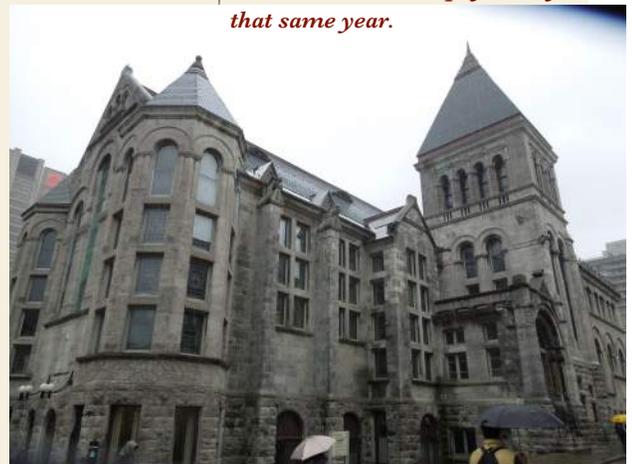
*County Road 85, and later became the Merritt Ranch. Mary describes the pre-paved roads in Hungry Hollow thus: "We hear lots of talk today [1931] about good roads, but those days we lived in Hungry Hollow we certainly knew what it meant to have good roads. It took*

*continued next page...*

*Mary Gaither, left, courtesy of Yolo County Archives*



*Etching of young Doctor Thornton Craig from the De Pue Collection 1879. Below, McGill University in Montreal, Canada today--I had to pay a visit! Doc Craig graduated in 1876 with a degree of MDCM and came to the Capay Valley that same year.*

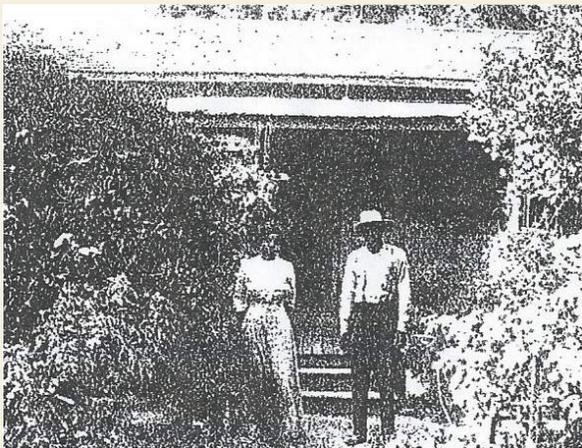


*In 1884 he married a Capay Valley girl, Lizzie Rhodes, whose father John Milton and his wife Mary Jane Beall Christmas owned 16,000 acres in upper Capay Valley and three flour mills in Madison, Knights Landing and Woodland. Thornton and Lizzie would have three sons and live in Capay for the rest of their lives.*



*Mary Gaither, Turn-of-the-Century Capay Valley Mid-wife and Nurse, continued*

us five hours to go to Madison in the winter time. Of course, there was no bridge this side of Madison, and we had to stop every little while and get out and scrape the mud off the wheels--that old adobe stuck until the wheels got so heavy the horses could hardly pull the load. Esparto at that time was only a wheat field. It took us two days to go to Woodland, and especially during the winter months, we never attempted to make the trip to town unless for emergency; we laid in supplies in the fall...Sometimes the farmers went to Sacramento in the fall to get their winter's supply, going in a sort of covered wagon and camping along the way and making a family outing of it. That trip would take a week. I can remember Mrs. Roth telling me they laid in their supplies in that way and she said they always took along some hens to lay eggs on the trip." This narrative is taken from the Esparto Exponent dated October 16, 1931, vol.15 no. 52. I did not have a copy, so John Gallardo hand-copied it out for me from his old, faded copy--his to me in beautiful cursive! I very much appreciate all the great support I get in this endeavor!



In this narrative, Mary goes on to say: "When the town of Esparto was laid out, there was much excitement; the railroad ran an excursion and there was a big crowd of people here...we located on Capay Street, with nothing there but some white sticks driven into the ground to mark the streets, where now towering walnut trees stand. I have seen the town grow and have witnessed all the buildings and improvements through the years...The brick for the Esparto Hotel and the other brick buildings in town was burned in a kiln just back of where the C.P. Ingram house now stands [in 1931]. One of the first houses to be built here was a two-story house that stood where the Durward Parker home now stands. It belonged to a Mr. Craig who worked at carpenter work with Mr. J.J. Smith [who

built the first high school and a church in Esparto, as well as in the white house great-grandson Charlie Schaupp is completely restoring to its original state on Esparto's main street: Yolo Ave/Highway 16; about 1889-1900]. After he left here, Mr. Rice Woods, a brother of Mrs. D.Q.Adams, lived there with his family and I served them many years in that house. The house afterwards burned.

I raised three boys here and they all attended both grammar and high schools. Elmer graduated in 1908 and was the first colored boy to graduate in Esparto and the second in the county...During all my years of life here I have followed nursing, and have served many, many homes. Oftentimes I have taken care of babies born to women whom I had cared for at their birth. It is much easier to take care of sick people here now than it was in the pioneer days. Dr. Craig who served the people here through all those early days, rode and drove over those terrible roads, swimming his horses across the creek, to care for the sick and to usher in the new generation that is now raising families of its own."



Mary and her husband Gus first bought their two Esparto lots in 1892, where they built a large home. Mary tended to the nursing needs of many people of all races in the Capay Valley. They also took in boarders in Esparto. She "traveled all around the Esparto area to treat the sick, first by horse and buggy and later in a Ford Motel T," according to the narrative for the *Stroll Through History* reenactment script created for the Yolo County Historical Society. Mary's husband Gus died in 1930 and she died on July 3, 1938. Along with Doc Thornton Craig, she was one of the Capay Valley's "best known and most respected people in the area."

Photos courtesy of Yolo County Archives: above left, Mary with Gus at their Esparto home; Gus, above.