



California's Black Walnuts, common enough in our area, but there is some confusion and mystery about their origin.



At top, at right and below, black walnut trees were planted along CR 14 from Zamora to Knight's Landing for many miles; to far right, 2 huge black walnuts at Best Ranch, north of Woodland; at bottom right, typical lined-road of mingled oaks and black walnuts.



one commonly found along Cache Creek and the one used for root stock for English Walnut trees, having a hardy root system adapted to Northern California. This Hindsii, or Northern California Black Walnut (see page 17 for example), is considered rare, but still appearing in canyons and valleys like ours, and was sighted here at pre-Spanish Native American campsites. The much larger (Eastern) Black Walnut, or Juglans nigra, the pioneers brought with them from Missouri, and we see them along our county roads, often mingled with the equally large Valley Oak, all intentionally planted for shade and wind breaks. The whole walnut family is Juglandaceae, of which we mostly have the two above-mentioned. Six species are native

Since several historical sources claim that pioneers brought eastern Black Walnut to plant along the roads and use the hard wood for gun stocks and furniture, I was curious about which black walnuts were native to our area. So I contacted Jeanette Wrynski at RCD (Yolo County Resource Conservation District), and using her excerpt from "The Jepson Manual, Higher Plants of California," James Hickman, Editor, I think I have a clearer picture. The Hind's Black Walnut is most likely the

throughout the US and all are deciduous--as seen mingled with the leafless oaks at right.



*Pioneer of Capay Valley, Robert Clooney, is one of many who helped plant the ubiquitous Black Walnuts along our county roads. In an interview recently re-published in the Woodland Record, Mr. Clooney tells many a great tale. The original article appeared in an interview with Mr. Clooney in the July 10, 1931 issue of the *Esparto Exponent*, "The Newspaper for Western Yolo County".*

As explained in the introduction to this story of our local black walnut trees, the appearance of huge black walnuts mixed with native oaks along many of our county roads is the work of pioneer labor in the 1800s. Several of the "old-timers" I asked claim these trees were wind breaks as well as shade for the long buggy rides on those new, slow-going, dirt roads. The black walnuts brought from the East were also used for lumber, as our native black walnut trees were often too small and the wood less hard.

*As the article points out, Robert Clooney worked on different farms throughout this area and helped establish some of the landmarks still standing today. He helped plant the Osage Oranges that still line the south side of Hwy 16 between Esparto and Madison. And at one point he worked on the Wyatt and Bill Duncan ranch north of Capay and "helped plant the row of huge walnut trees that still line the west side of the road leading to the home of Mrs. M.E. Duncan." Well, those trees were still there on my great grandparents' ranch when we were young, as seen in the photo at right taken in 1963. Those Black Walnuts seen lining the road behind us "Duncan descendants" with the pony cart were an annual source of Christmas shopping money for all of us--the same ones planted by Mr. Clooney 100 years before. Most of those grand trees have been "harvested" in recent years by subsequent owners of the ranch, but the impressive one in the top photo still stands nearby, and the one below shows how tenacious they are when felled. The picture at the bottom right is of the more rare, native *Hindsii* Black Walnut typically near Cache Creek, with the multi-branched, shorter stature.*



*Sources:
"Varieties of
Black Walnuts" at
<http://www.ehow.com>
and *The Jepson Manual, Higher
Plants of California**

