



A new Era in the West: 1820s to mid-1840s --and how it affected the Capay Valley

We all know that Oregon and California were greatly changed after gold was discovered in 1848, an event that led to the westward rush in 1849 and to eventual statehood in 1850. But many of us are not as aware of how many adventuresome souls were here even before the 1849 Gold Rush. To better understand these changes, a brief history of the early 19th century California might help show how when the gold “panned out” many stayed on for the real “gold” here--the land of opportunity.

The Spanish established far fewer land grants than did the Mexicans, who had won their independence in 1822. Much more comfortable doing business with “foreigners,” such as trappers, traders, sailors and merchants, the Mexican government attempted to settle the area by issuing huge tracts of land to individual landlords, not unlike the European feudal system. The present native population was meant to be left to use the land “unmolested” in an attempt to keep the peace and continue to increase the settlement claims on the land. Foreigners were able to apply for grants if they first converted to Catholicism. Governors were encouraged to issue land grants, which became ranchos of many leagues. With these ranchos, the raising and marketing of beef and hides became important commerce.

*By the time adventuresome trapper Jedediah Smith [reportedly an ancestor of the Capay Valley Covingtons] came overland in 1826, a pattern was already established that opened a floodgate of interest that would so challenge the Mexican hold on the land that it would end with a war and the US taking possession of Alta California 1847. But even that was nothing to the changes that a gold discovery in 1848 would bring. In the following year alone, estimates claim 100,000 new people came to California. **The importance of wheat and cattle exploded as the hungry population grew.** And California was perfect for it: dry most of the year with large expanses of natural grasslands led to dry farming, while the rolling hills led to natural cattle grazing. It wasn't long before many of those 100,000 newcomers figured out that there was more money to be made feeding the masses than there was to be pulled from the creeks in gold. While two of the most powerful forces in that regard are Hugh Glenn, the wheat king, and Henry Miller, the cattle king, many others found their way to large tracts of land to make their wealth and to start California dynasties of their own—many here in the greater Capay Valley area. Instead of hundreds of thousands of acres, local settlers bought up pieces of huge land grants as they became available and farmed or ranched thousands of acres in the lush valley and the flats and rolling hill areas surrounding it. In addition to wheat and cattle, the fertile valley with its natural watershed proved also suited to orchards and vineyards.*

The development of what is now Yolo County: 1820s-1860s

Per "History Spots of California" it says of Cacheville/Yolo:

1828 American explorer Jedediah Strong Smith is thought to have hunted and trapped on the streams of now-Yolo County. He was followed by the numerous Hudson's Bay Company trappers. They cached their furs along the river and smaller streams, one of which would be known as *Cache Creek*, but then was known at *Rio de Jesus Maria*. One of their camps was called French Camp by early settlers and was on the north bank of Cache Creek about a mile east of present day Yolo, formerly known as Cacheville.

"The old Hutton house is still standing on 325 Main Street. In 1857 the place became the county seat of Yolo County and was rechristened Cacheville. The post office had been established under the name of Yolo in 1853...by 1862 Woodland had become an important agricultural center. In that year the people voted to make it the county seat in place of Washington [which had been the county seat from 1851-57 and again 1861-1862]; further, Fremont on the Sacramento River" a half mile below the Feather River confluence "was briefly the first county seat of Yolo County in 1850-51."

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William Gordon not only was credited by some sources as the “*first white settler in what is now Yolo County,*” he is also given credit by many as the first to grow wheat here, and in 1847 he started the first school on his land near Madison. “‘*Uncle Billy*’ was a trapper and hunter, ‘*rough and uneducated, honest, and hospitable*’ and his place on Cache Creek was a ‘*general rendezvous for settlers and hunters from 1843 to 1846,*’--but also cattlemen, as we will see!--per “*The History of Yolo County.*”

The First Massive California to Oregon Cattle Drive in 1843

The first of many interesting and daring cattle drives from the greater Capay Valley to Oregon involved the Gordon ranch, and also the area that would become the town of Yolo; typical of visitors to the area at this time, most rested on the Quesisosi Grant: “*In the spring and summer of 1830 another band of hunters, led by Ewing Young, trapped along the San Joaquin and Sacramento rivers and remained for a time on Cache Creek. Two years later, on his way to Oregon, Young again passed through Yolo County territory, camping near the mouth of Cache Creek [near Yolo/Cacheville]. Following up Capay Valley past Clear Lake, the party reached the coast some 75 miles north of Fort Ross, where they continued north as far as the Umpqua River in Oregon.*” Joseph Gale had been with this 1831 party and “*later held a cattle rendezvous on Cache Creek in 1843. The need for more livestock in Willamette Valley, Oregon, was the incentive to a daring project begun by Gale in 1841....he set to work to construct a ocean-going vessel which he proposed to take to California and there exchange for livestock...*” *The Star of Oregon* was launched on May 19, 1841 and late August 1842 set sail down the Columbia River to California. In SF, Jose Y. Limantour bought the ship in exchange for 350 cows. Needing more men to this stock-drive over the mountains to the Oregon settlement, Gale waited until the spring of 1843, gathered on Cache Creek. They recruited men eager to settle in Oregon and by May 14, 1843, drove 1250 cattle, 600 horses and mules & 3000 sheep over the northern mountain barrier for 75 days.”

The development of Cattlemen and Cattle between Oregon and California; To Explorers and Pioneers and Prospectors, all those Golden Native Grasses look like Bonanza! From Free-range to Barbed-wire, Grains and Alfalfa--California becomes Cowboy Country...But first, they have to get here...

Culled from various Histories of California and Oregon, I found the following, helping to show the movement of cattle between California and Oregon. Note, some of these names will sound familiar to us in the greater Capay Valley:

The Oregon Star, the first ship built in Oregon, set sail August 1842 and reached the Pacific Ocean in September 1842. On board were a group of young men who hoped to find white brides and better opportunities in California: Felix HATHAWAY, Joseph GALE, R.L. KILBORNE, Pleasant ARMSTRONG, George DAVIS, Charles MATTS and John GREEN.”

In October 1842, the Methodist missionaries and some settlers established the Island Milling Company to operate a mill on an island near the Willamette Falls. This launched a long and acrimonious land dispute with Dr. John McLoughlin.

Mount St. Helens erupted December 12, 1842. In Oregon, the winter of 1842-43 was exceptionally cold; ice blocked the Columbia River until March 13, 1843.

John C. FREMONT (1813-1890, a lieutenant in the engineer corps) led his second EXPLORING EXPEDITION during 1843. His troops left the Missouri and Kansas rivers junction on May 2, traveling slightly behind the 1843 wagon train. They turned off the emigrant road at Soda Springs to explore the Great Salt Lake. The 1843 wagon train trickled into the Willamette Valley over a period of weeks: some found a way through the mountains or along the shore with wagons and cattle; some went by way of Lapwaih, Waiilatpu and Walla Walla; and still others went directly to Ft. Walla Walla where they embarked in canoes down the Columbia River. Most had reached the Willamette Valley by late November 1843.

[All-Capitals were in the original texts for emphasis, so I left them...]



Meanwhile, FREMONT'S EXPEDITION had rejoined the Oregon Trail from their side trip to the Great Salt Lake. At a little bay along the Columbia River just below the Cascades, Fremont encountered a German botanist named LUDER who was working on his own.

The company with Fremont arrived November 4, 1843 at *the Dalles*, Oregon [*the end of the Oregon Trail*]. Fremont's Expedition continued on to California after purchasing supplies at Ft. Vancouver. They crossed the summit of the Sierra Nevadas [*interesting route...*] in January 1844, on their way to Sutter's Fort, California. Back in the States, Fremont was awarded a presidential nomination as "Pathfinder"; he also won a popular reputation as the "discoverer" of Oregon.

L.W. HASTINGS led a company toward California from Champoeg, Oregon, on May 30. Most of these were Oregon Trail travelers of 1842, now bound for California.

SOURCE: Lansford W. Hastings Emigrants Guide to Oregon and California [1845] (Hastings) also in Huntington Library MS; "Lansford W. Hastings Papers, 1847-49" (Bancroft MS); Hastings also wrote A New History of Oregon and California [1849].

Hastings arrived at the Sacramento River with only 16 men, about two-thirds of his original party. Although this party faced Indian attacks at the Shasta mountains and Sacramento River, there had been no fatalities on the way; about a third of the company had turned around and headed back to Oregon when they met a north-bound group from California.

L.P. LESSE and John MCCLURE led the party who reached the Willamette Valley from California in the summer of 1843. Henry BLACK and Joel WALKER returned with this company to Oregon in 1843, *driving a herd of horses and cattle*.

Elected as officials and sworn in July 5, 1843, were: David Hill, Alanson Beers, and Joseph Gale, the Executive. The demise of the early provisional government (as well as of the Methodist Missions) began early in 1844. The arrival of the great migration of 1843 in November, contention between the United States and Britain over jurisdiction, and U.S. Congress's legislation on Oregon ended the early pioneer era.

A FINAL NOTE: On September 28, 1843, J.W. Nesmith passed the Lone Pine, a frequently noted Trail landmark about 30 trail miles before the valley of Grande Ronde. By the time Lt. Fremont and his troops passed this place, someone had cut down the tree. The Lone Pine, which lent its name to the present-day city of La Pine, was only a stump after 1843. ***One era has ended and another begun...***

Cattle Industry--and Rustling--are Alive and Well!

Today, while cattle may not be driven such a distance on foot by horse-mounted cowboys, the business is still alive and well--even booming with a renewed culinary interest in beef. A breed bull can go at auction for \$20,000 and produce 40,000 off-spring in his lifetime--many of whom will end up as the "increasingly popular Black Angus choice meat cuts and rib-eye steaks," according to Anne Gonzales in the *Sacramento Bee*, September 14, 2012. She went on to point out that the 17th annual *Black Gold Bull Sale* was held at Colusa County Fairgrounds in 2012 and drew over 65 buyers from "all over the western United States and Midwest." I noted the odd title was "*Nearly 150 Bulls Sold for Breeding--or Steak*," presumably implying that someone might actually eat meat from a bull...last I heard, a bull was pretty stringy and tough, which is why cattlemen, ahem, "mark" the majority of the young bulls to make them steers--producing much more marbled and tender meat--but I digress. The point is, California cattle are still "gold," even though most are driven to market by truck these days--either legally or not!

Which brings me to another interesting article in the *Bee*--cattle rustling is on the rise! With an average cow now bringing around \$1000, it is easy to see how someone might be tempted to make an easy profit by taking a few, say by trucks and trailers. "The speed of transport means you can load up a gooseneck trailer full of cattle and be in Colorado 24 hours later," quotes *Bee* author Edward Ortiz. Thing is, most of us are not equipped to do such work--so it is assumed that the rustlers are already knowledgeable people in the cattle business. According to John Suther, senior investigator with the Bureau of Livestock Identification, "They're neighbors. They're employees--hired men...It's a specialized business so people with knowledge of the cattle industry are the ones stealing these animals." All young calves are branded with a registered mark, so they are being rustled at an even earlier age to outwit the brand inspectors. In some cases, they are rounded up stealth-like by cattle thieves on horseback, then loaded into trailers for transport.

But don't be tempted: cattle rustling used to be a hanging offense...surely not worth THAT!

A Cattle Drive Through Guinda

WED, FEB 14, 1968



Farnham and Byron Covington

In 1968 an article appeared in a local paper covering what used to be a common occurrence--cattle being driven through the Capay Valley by cowboys on horseback. Pictured and quoted here are Lee Farnham and Byron Covington, descendants of early ranching families in the Valley. They lament the number of cars (in 1968!) and wonder what it will be like in a few years. Today, the vast number of visitors to the Casino in Brooks and to the ever-more popular valley would make a cattle drive down Highway 16 improbable. But such drives are making a come-back, at least for their novelty. Recently, the Farm-to-Fork movement brought a cattle drive to Old Sacramento and at the Stockyards in Fort Worth, Texas, it is a daily tourist attraction.

Newsclips courtesy of Gail Graham, owner of The Capay Junction Saloon

way. Along the way some calves and steers became overly curious about the Methodist church, the town hall, Andy Smith's phone exchange and assorted bushes, flowers and dogs, but were kept to the straight and more or less narrow by riders on their flanks.

It was a kind of thing, common in all the days the valley remembers, that is within the past 100 years or so, but a kind of thing passing from the scene.

And the reason for this, of course, is people. People in cars primarily, but people nonetheless.

"Country is getting

crowded," Farnham commented, looking around at the town of Guinda and at the brace of cars moving cautiously at either end of the riders.

And so in its way the country is getting overcrowded.

It becomes easier and easier for the ordinary working stiff to come up with what used to be considered the amenities of life -- the refrigerators, the cars, the televisions, the houses. The hard things to get and keep nowadays are what used to be the common place things: the living things like dogs and cats, and horses. Sometimes it

seems that the simpler a man's desires are the more difficult the satisfaction of them in these days of multiplying complexities.

Anyway, the "Sunday drive was a little taste of the past in the present and was roundly enjoyed by those who attended it as a social event of some importance and considerable joy.

A little later in the year, after the grass turns color, the same men, boys, women, kids, dogs, plus perhaps a few more, and this reporter if he is lucky, will make the roundup in the hills on that west side.

In 1931 Frank Duncan was interviewed by the *Esparto Exponent* about his memories of growing up in Capay in the late 1800s. [see Pg 2, also] At right is one of his memories, pointing out that Capay didn't have a stock corral until 1915; ranchers had to drive their cattle to Madison or Cadenasso on horseback. [See entire Memoir/Interview on greatercapayvalley.org]

After their right of way was fenced and they were running over it, a crew was sent up and tore up the switch and put it at the upper end of town, where they built their warehouse -- leaving this great mountain of wheat piled where the old switch was. Finally, the Railroad Company sent in flat cars at night and we loaded the grain out and we finally got it all shipped before rains, but we were pretty worried for a time. They didn't even give us a stock corral, we had to drive our stock to Madison or Cadenasso. Not until 1915 did Capay have even a stock corral.

What Goes Around Comes Around: Grass-fed Beef was the Norm in Early California and is now the *New Rage*. For decades, grazing cattle in our hills led to finishing them off in feed lots on fattening grains--and often chemicals to bulk them up, still common across the cattle-producing world--but many in California have started a trend back to the more natural method of grass-only grazing and sustainable land management. Beginning in the 1970s, *Natural, Sustainable and Organic* methods of farming and ranching began to take hold in Yolo County, often led by graduates of our local ag-school, UC Davis. Many in the greater Capay Valley embraced this trend and have carried it to a very successful farm-to-form movement across the state--and country! One such family-run company is Yolo Land and Cattle Company:



For grass-fed beef: Scott & Karen Stone(530) 661-7038

For jerky, events, or weddings:

Casey & Angela Stone (530) 662-4093

See the website for Info on: Our Ranch : Our Commitment : Grass fed Beef : Jerky & Products : Event Venue

Yolo Land & Cattle Co.

Mailing address: PMB# 194, 1296 E. Gibson Road, Woodland, California 95776

(No walk-ins at this location.)

(Yolo County, near Sacramento and San Francisco Bay Area)

Contact Us: FOR BEEF 530-661-7038 or FOR JERKY AND EVENTS 530-662-4093

For website questions or comments contact the Webmaster (webmaster@yololandandcattle.com).

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Yolo Land & Cattle Co. Yolo County, CA

Conservation-minded family permanently protects their ranching operations

On March 25, 2005, Yolo Land & Cattle Co. placed approximately 6,983 acres into a land preservation agreement to be held by California Rangeland Trust. The Yolo Land & Cattle Co. Ranch is part of the Blue Ridge-Berryessa Natural Area which covers over 500,000 acres of inner-coastal rangeland and contains a unique assemblage of ecological communities. The ranch, studded with ponds and other wetlands, natural stream courses and waterways, and un-fragmented open space, provides habitat for native common and rare plants. Supporters of the project anticipate that this preservation agreement will serve as a catalyst to promote future conservation projects in Yolo County, where there is strong, long-term local political support for private conservation efforts of all kinds. The conservation agreement with family owned and operated Yolo Land & Cattle Co. will allow the owners to continue their innovative stewardship practices and entrepreneurial marketing techniques. The project was funded by the California Wildlife Conservation Board and the Great Valley Center. http://www.rangelandtrust.org/conservation-yolo_ranch.php

Established in 1976, Yolo Land & Cattle Co. resulted from the vision of family patriarch Henry H. Stone and his wife Suzanne. The original partnership operated on numerous ranches throughout California and Nevada, until Henry acquired sole interest in 1983. As the geneticist in the family, Henry utilized many types of cattle breeds over the years before settling on a Black Angus & Hereford cross as the optimum range cow. While most folks would have long retired, Henry is still going strong. Recently, he started a successful purebred Angus operation, which produces seed-stock for the commercial operation.

Sons Scott and Casey eventually joined their father to complete the present-day partnership. *Today, all family members are involved, and the ranch remains a true family business.*