

## Western Yolo Grange #423 in Guinda



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Below: at the Grange Hall for Almond Festival 2013--Frank and Marian Nichols



Below: Frank Nichols and Clarence Van Hook



Below, front: the late Al Hayes enjoying Black History Day 2010



I had been meaning to write about the Grange Hall in Guinda and the delightful couple, Frank and Marian Nichols, who manage it, and the article in the December 2012 issue of the *Valley Voice* newspaper for the Capay Valley just inspired me to do so for this issue. The Nichols have just been given the “*prestigious Grange Lifetime Achievement Award at the 140th annual meeting of the California State Grange...highest honor, recognizing not only the accomplishments of members who have contributed so much to the Grange, but in doing so, to their fellow Grangers, and their communities,*” according to California State Grand President Bob McFarland, as quoted in the *Valley Voice*. Frank has been a Grange member since 1946 and Marian since 1956, the year they married--57 years last December! I have attended a number of events held at the Guinda Grange Hall over the years, especially Black History Day and Almond Festival, and have had the pleasure of meeting these two kind and dedicated sweethearts many times--always a blessing and delight!

A bit of history of the town of Guinda and of the Grange and what it means to a community like the Capay Valley is in order. *The valley’s agricultural growth led to the establishment of the Capay Valley grange, officially Western Yolo Grange #423. The grange grew quickly and by 1879 had 66 members--and the town of Guinda grew right along with it. The Guinda store (still in use) was built in 1891 and the Guinda Hotel in 1893 (torn down in the 1990s) and are seen in photos on next page. Both were busy and successful during their early years, and the Guinda Hotel supported a popular bar until the 1950s. A substantial two-story elementary school building was erected at Guinda. Fruit packing sheds began to operate in Guinda and Rumsey, making daily seasonal deliveries to two trains with ice cars, though some other ambitious land company plans were short-lived.*

*Guinda, long the trading center for the upper Capay Valley, was laid out on 1300 acres in the late 1880’s by the Southern Pacific RR. Five hundred town lots were surveyed and additional twenty-acre parcels outside the town were also made available. While Rumsey became the northern terminus of the railroad, Guinda became the trading center for the northern valley due primarily to its strategic location within the Capay Valley. Guinda was founded by English settlers who were lured by advertisements, a prevalent technique often used during this era. By 1904 many of the “English” had left, and other ethnic pioneers arrived. By 1913 the town was the chief shipping point in the Capay Valley, consisting of large sheds, a general store, harness shop, meat market, barber shop, candy store, blacksmith shop, hotel and post office. Much of the early growth of the town was due to the efforts of the Guinda Improvement Club, an organization founded in 1907.*

*When the railroad era ended in 1934, Guinda began to decline. Although the railroad was replaced by automobile and truck traffic, the town of Williams and the Highway 20 route to the north, rather than Highway 16, benefitted most from the new mode of travel. By 1940 the town’s population was 235. From the end of World War II until the mid 1980’s, the town steadily declined. In 1970 Cal-Trans listed the town’s population at 93. Since roughly the mid 1980’s the town has profited from a small revival due to its popularity as a retirement area, new small farm operations, and it has become a center for outdoor activities: the Cache Creek has become very popular as a rafting area and many rafters take out at Nichols Park, which is located near the southern part of the town. The recent casino in the more southern town of Brooks has also led to more tourism and interest in the town of Guinda.*

History courtesy of Douglas Nareau



**California Grange** is the state grange division of the National Grange, which came into being in 1867. The National Grange, officially known as the Order of Patrons of Husbandry, was started by activist farmer Oliver Hudson Kelley from Minnesota. He felt that farmers, being independent and scattered, needed a national organization to represent them similar to what unions did for industrial workers. Guinda's grange is in the local division of granges which is part of the greater county grange of Yolo. The Grange motto is: "In Essentials, Unity - In Non-essentials, Liberty - In all Things, Charity." It is interesting to note that the National Grange was the first fraternal organization to include women.

Our own grange hall is located at 16787 Forrest Avenue just behind the Guinda Store, which sits in the middle of town on Highway 16. Established in the early 1900s it offers a meeting area for many local activities, most notably Black History Day and activities for the Almond Festival in February. They are a member of the Chamber of Commerce and support sustainable and traditional agriculture, among other things. Many of their members--currently at 127--have contributed to the betterment of the Capay Valley for many generations. Our grange maintains the Guinda Park and established a softball diamond there; sponsors the Almond Queen dinner and co-hosts the

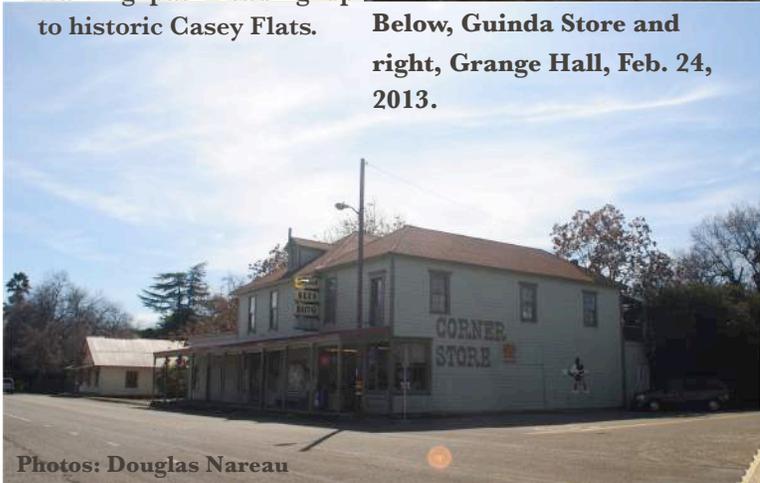
Almond Festival itself. They support many of the local activities, festivals and events, and donate scholarships for 2-3 Esparto High School students annually. They have a certified kitchen which they rent out as needed and offer the hall for a minimal fee for youth dances. Local churches have met there, as has the local AA. They have been involved in recycling in the past and hope to renew these efforts to do their part to keep the valley "green."

Info from their website at: [westernyologrange.org](http://westernyologrange.org)

At Right: downtown Guinda in 1908. The late Guinda Hotel is in the foreground; beyond, the barbershop, now an empty lot; Forrest Avenue runs between this lot and the historic Guinda Store seen beyond it. The Grange Hall sits just behind the store. If you continue up Forrest Ave., you come to a public walking path leading up to historic Casey Flats.



Below, Guinda Store and right, Grange Hall, Feb. 24, 2013.



Photos: Douglas Nareau

