

YOLO COUNTY'S EARLY FAMILIES

Bemmerly

John Bemmerly was born in Württemberg, Germany, and came to the United States in 1847. He found work in New York as a farmhand, and then came overland to California in 1852 in a covered wagon (pictured, right). He had little success looking for gold, so began farming on land in the northwest part of Yolo County, which he later bought from the US Government.

John married Agnes Wimmer, from Baden, Germany, in 1860, and they had five children. He farmed and raised cattle near Dunnigan, but his premature death left his young wife Agnes to manage the ranch on her own for many years. Agnes Bemmerly expanded the family's holdings to 7,200 acres and operated one of the largest sheep ranches in the county.



Davis

Jerome Davis was born on his family's farm in Ohio in 1822. In 1845, he enlisted in John C. Fremont's first survey expedition and first arrived in California in December. After a return to St. Louis, Davis again set out for California in the spring of 1849 and briefly tried his hand at gold mining.

Settling in Sacramento he established Yolo County's first dairy and, in partnership with Joseph B Chiles, Jerome operated a rope ferry across the Sacramento River. During the Gold Rush, milk sold for an amazing \$1.00 a gallon. With that plus ferry tolls, Davis would sometimes bring in \$10,000 a month.

Jerome's father Isaac helped him expand the farm, and in 1858 he received a silver trophy of excellence from the California State Agricultural Society, and later served as its president. In November 1867, Isaac Davis mortgaged the southern part of the ranch to the California Pacific Railroad line, and the town of Davisville (now Davis) grew around the railway depot. Nearly 800 acres of the original ranch later formed the basis for the University Farm, now UC Davis.

YOLO COUNTY'S EARLY FAMILIES

Gaither

Mary Gaither was born in Booneville, Missouri to parents Willis and Marcia Brisco on May 4, 1865. After her mother's untimely death (Mary was just 10 years old), she went to care for the son of Dr. Evans. Under his supervision, Mary trained as a nurse. . Mary married Augustus Gaither who had a sister and brother-in-law, Elijah and Sarah Jennings, who lived in California. Elijah's half-brother was well-known land-owner Basil Campbell. Through these connections, Mary and Gus came to California in 1886 and began working in Hungry Hollow on Jennings' land (today known as Merritt Ranch) in Esparto.

In 1892, Mary and Gus bought two Esparto lots where they would build a large home. Mary tended to the nursing needs of many people in Capay Valley – both at her home, and by making house calls. She traveled all around the Esparto area to treat the sick, first by horse and buggy and later in a Ford Model T. Mary had 3 sons, Edward, Elmer, Leland. All three attended both grammar and high school in Yolo County. Elmer graduated in 1908 and was the first African American to graduate in Esparto. Mary Frances Gaither passed away on July 3rd, 1938.



Tafoya

Ramon Tafoya was born in Penjamo, Guanajuato, Mexico and came to the US with his father who worked on the Southern Pacific Railroad in Texas. In 1918 young Ramon moved to California, working in a variety of jobs in the sugar beet and tomato fields in Yolo County. Later he became a labor contractor, who for a set fee from the farmer would recruit, hire, transport, and pay agricultural workers for a specific job like harvesting tomatoes or beans.

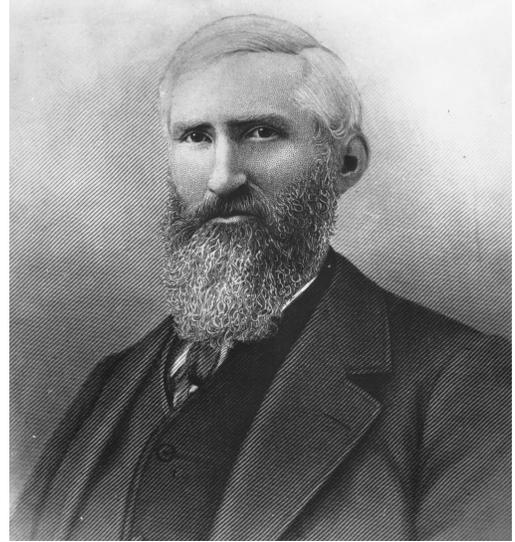
Ramon married Lupe Arellano in 1923 and they had 11 children. In 1948 Ramon bought the truck scales on East Street in Woodland, and later he built Tafoya's Market next door. He was very active in the community life of Woodland, founding the Guadalupana Society and Los Charros Caporales. He served on the board of directors of Cache Creek Bank, United Community Fund, and the Yolo County Fair.

YOLO COUNTY'S EARLY FAMILIES

Wolfskill

The first US Citizen to settle on a Mexican land grant in what is now Yolo County was John Wolfskill. He took possession of the Rancho Rio de los Putos in 1842. He came to California from Kentucky in 1838. Putah Creek flowed through his land, south of what later became known as the town of Winters. He imported and experimented with growing many different kinds of crops. As soon as land was cleared, he planted his seeds and cuttings, carefully watering them with the fresh, clear water flowing from Putah Creek.

By 1850, thanks to John R. Wolfskill, many other Sacramento Valley farmers were also growing vines and figs, olives, walnuts, oranges, and apricots.



These brief stories are excerpted and adapted from:

History of Yolo County, California, with Biographical Sketches of the Leading Men and Women of the County

By Tom Gregory, et al.,

Historic Record Company, Los Angeles, California, 1913

Pioneers of Yolo County

Author Unknown

Booklet on file in the Yolo County Historical Collection

Woodland: City of Trees

ShIPLEY Walters

Yolo County Historical Society, Woodland, California, 1995

Capay Valley Journal Vol. 10

Author Unknown

The Greater Capay Valley Historical Society, Esparto, California, 2012