

THE MORAGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

2022 First Quarter

MORAGA MEMORIES-YESTERDAY, TODAY, TOMORROW

Eliza J. Berry Headstone in Moraga

by Susan Skilton, Research Director, Moraga Historical Society

Eliza, or Elisa, as named on her headstone, the young wife of John J. Berry, died on 31 July 1876 in San Francisco of complications of childbirth.¹ She was buried the same day in Calvary

in San Francisco. Her remains were removed to San Mateo in 1940.

Somehow the headstone emerged and was taken into storage by the Moraga Historical Society. Tracing Eliza's headstone, burials, and family background create an intriguing challenge. Her headstone states she was a native of Detroit, Michigan, and was 28 years old when she died. Thus, she was born about 1848. Her headstone provides a middle initial and memorializes her as Elisa J. Berry.



Cemetery in Colma, in

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Slowly the Moraga Historical Society is returning after COVID shutdown! The Society hosted a booth at the Pear and Wine Festival in September, and it was heartwarming to see so many residents and visitors greeting us. Now that MHS has met their good faith \$100,000 pledge to the Friends of the Joaquin Moraga Adobe toward the purchase of the Adobe, committee work is beginning on structural details of the Adobe and interior amenities. Our website continues to grow under the skilled hand of John Kaiser and our shelves are stocked with merchandise for sale. We plan to begin our speaker series in the new year and look forward to your participation.

¹ "Register of Interments," 1876, p. 259, Eliza Berry, died 31 July 1876, Cavalry Cemetery, San Francisco, California; digital image, [sfgenealogy](https://www.sfgenealogy.com) (sfgenealogy.com), accessed November 2021.

San Francisco cemeteries were moved to Colma starting in the 1930s. Family members had to pay if they wanted to keep the tombstones. Given the span of time between some of the burials and the removals, it is not surprising many headstones remained unclaimed. Most of the headstones were sold for future use in public works, according to Michael Svanevik, who wrote *City of Souls*.² Franklin Jerome. Berry, the infant son of John J. and the late Eliza Berry, died of marasmus, or undernourishment, on 21 August 1876. He was buried the next day in Calvary Cemetery.³ His remains could not be found in his original gravesite, so they were not reburied.⁴

CALVARY CEMETERY, SAN FRANCISCO		20708		REMOVAL RECORD			
FAMILY NAME	FIRST NAME	MIDDLE NAME	DORMITORY	STATION	AREA	GRAVE	
BERRY	Franklin	S	5	62	9	5	
RELATIONSHIP		AGE	DATE OF BURIAL		REGISTER—VOLUME—PAGE:		
Child of John J. & Eliza		1mo	Aug 22 1876		II-262		
NAME OF PURCHASER		DATE OF PURCHASE					
XXX							
REMARKS							
NATURE OF FIND							
No find							
HOLY CROSS CEMETERY	DORMITORY	STATION	AREA	GRAVE	NO. OF FAMILY BURIED—OR SINGLE INTERMENT		
SIGNATURE OF FOREMAN—CALVARY CEMETERY				NAME OF WORKMAN—CALVARY CEMETERY			
26				2-50			

John J. Berry did not live much longer. He committed suicide a few months later over his wife's grave, holding a Catholic prayer book in his hand. On a flyleaf he wrote the words which reveal how distraught he was at losing his wife and son. As reported in a San Francisco newspaper, *Daily Alta*, he wrote, "It is with me insanity or death, and in my weak Judgment I prefer the latter. God help my baby and forgive me."⁵ The dramatic death was also reported in a

Sacramento newspaper. John lived in Sacramento for several years, where he was an esteemed employee in the general freight office of Central Pacific Railroad.⁶ John J. Berry probably lived in Michigan at some time, for the article in the *Daily Alta* newspaper states he was a native of that state. His enlistment record in the Army, notes that he was born in Buffalo, Erie County, New York. This is a credible document for his birth location, since he was likely the person who provided the information. John J. Berry died on 7 November 1876 and was buried on 9 November in a Grand Army of the Republic plot in the Odd Fellows Cemetery in San Francisco.⁷ The grave was located in Lot 27 of the Excelsior section in the middle tier. No lot owner is identified.⁸ As noted above, John J. Berry was born in 1841 in Buffalo, New York, according to his military record. A bookkeeper before enlisting, he served in the cause of the Union in the Civil War from California, signing up in San Francisco. He served in Company K in the 1st Regiment California Infantry and was mustered out on January 1865 at Fort Union, New Mexico. His remains, like those of Eliza's, were removed from San Francisco. He was reinterred in 1933 in Greenlawn Memorial Park in Colma, according to *Find a Grave*. Mysteries remain. What was Eliza's maiden name, and who were her parents? How did she meet John J. Berry, and where and when did they marry? And how did the headstone get to Moraga?

² Jon Brooks, "Why Are There So Many Graves in Colma? And So Few in San Francisco?" KQED (<https://www.kqed.org>), accessed November 2021.

³ "Register of Interments, 1876," p. 262, Franklin J. Berry, son of John J. and Eliza, died 22 August 1876, Cavalry Cemetery, San Francisco, California; digital image, *sfgenealogy* ([sfgenealogy.com](https://www.sfgenealogy.com)), accessed November 2021.

⁴ "Removal Record," Cavalry Cemetery, San Francisco, California, Franklin S. Berry, child of John J. and Eliza, buried 22 August 1876, no find; digital image, *sfgenealogy* ([sfgenealogy.com](https://www.sfgenealogy.com)), accessed November 2021.

⁵ "Inquest," *Daily Alta California*, 9 November 1876, p. 2, column 1; digital image, *California Digital Newspaper Collection*, accessed November 2021.

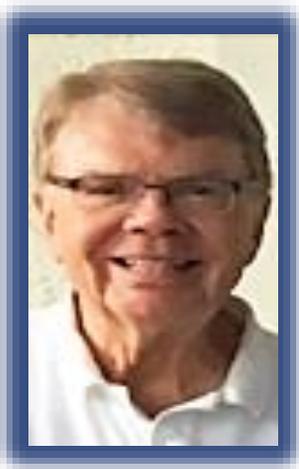
⁶ "City Intelligence," *Sacramento Daily Union*, Sacramento, California, 9 November 1876, p. 3, column 3; digital image, *California Digital Newspaper Collection*, accessed November 2021.

⁷ U.S. Army, War Department, National Cemetery Interment Control Forms, 1928-1962, John J. Berry, Company K, 1st Volunteer California Infantry, died 7 November 1876, interred 31 January 1933 San Francisco National Cemetery Section C, grave 32; digital image, "U.S., National Cemetery Interment Control Forms, 1928-1962," *Ancestry* (<https://www.ancestry.com>), accessed November 2021.

⁸ "Interment Ledger," I.O.O. F, 1876, digital image, California, City and County of San Francisco, cemetery records, 1865-1932, microfilm 4164048, *FamilySearch* ([familysearch.org](https://www.familysearch.org)), accessed November 2021.

After serving on the Moraga Historical Society Board for many years, Dick Olsen is retiring.

Dick Olsen, Moraga's 2013 Citizen of the Year, with interests in the arts, business and politics brought a great deal of experience to our Board. Involved in Moraga since its incorporation in 1974, Dick helped shape the Moraga-Orinda Fire District and provided countless hours of knowledgeable, dedicated service to the town. As vice president of corporate relations and director of the Transamerica Foundation, Dick gained a taste for the non-profit world. On the Boards of the Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archives and the UC Berkeley Young Musicians Program he also served on the board of the Eye Research Foundation at UCSF Medical School. On our Board, Dick was responsible for many wonderful "Romerias" (field trips) for our membership. Paying attention to every detail of the experience, trips always included lunch and expert guides.



After our successful campaign to raise \$100,000 for the Joaquin Moraga Adobe, Susan Sperry and Susan Skilton are partnering with the Friends of the Joaquin Moraga Adobe on the Museum Committee to plan the interior of the Adobe. The floor plan has been finalized with three rooms being furnished in 19th century Rancho furnishings, a separate room for historical displays and a rotating exhibit room. As part of this task, Susan Sperry joined the Friends in September on a tour of the restored Boronda Adobe in Salinas built about the same time as the Moraga Adobe. Dr. Ruben Mendoza gave us a special tour and highlighted the similarities to our 1841 adobe.

Needed

The Board of Directors is looking for a Treasurer to replace Bob Sornsen who is retiring. Please contact Susan Sperry at 925-376-3053 if you are available or know of someone to fill the position.



Moraga Valley Store



The structure was two-storied including rooms above the first-floor mercantile space. The two sets of framed double doors suggest entrances to separate areas within-mercantile and saloon. Upstairs rooms may have been used for The social center of the Moraga Valley in the 1850's was the Moraga Valley Store. It supplied everything from food to nails, clothing to saddles. The backroom saloon was popular with the lumberjacks and teamsters who milled Moraga's redwoods in Canyon and the newly arrived squatter farmers and two rancho families. Traffic from the redwoods and store patronage increased after Elam Brown purchased the Canyon redwoods from Joaquin Moraga in 1853, and ox-drawn wagons began hauling lumber from the steam mill to the port in Martinez

The Moraga Valley Store, said to be the second frame building in Moraga, was owned and operated by 20-year-old New Yorker John P. Courter and was opened in the spring of

1854. Courter bought six acres from Joaquin Moraga recognizing the economic possibilities of such an establishment. Located on the road that led from the redwoods to the shipping port in Martinez, it was on the site of the present-day parking lot of St. Monica Church. Business was brisk. Lumberjacks sought supplies, relaxation and feed/water for their oxen. As the squatter families grew so too grew the need for a handy mercantile outlet. The store served as an official County bulletin board.

guest accommodations. The family occupied a farmhouse to the rear of the store. John lived there with the John I. VanDuyne family, a fellow New Yorker who was married to Joaquin Moraga's eldest granddaughter, Benedita. Courter operated the store for nearly three years, even then admitting several others into partnership.

The store was a rather wild place! Joseph Lamson, Justice of the Peace, quotes, ". . . a foray occurred at Courter and Johnson's Store in which a worthless fellow, Gann, stabbed another young fellow, equally worthless, three times, inflicting some pretty severe but not fatal wounds. Gann fled and nobody cared to pursue him." Elsie Mastick tells of gun fights and a hanging in a nearby tree for horse stealing.

Because money was scarce with both Mexicans and squatters, grocery bills were often paid off with deeds of property. Consequently, Courter and his successor, Louis Maison, acquired title to a number of ranchos in the area.

After Maison's sudden death in 1861, the Moraga Valley Store was managed by Ferdinand Wilke for Maison's widow, Leonita. She later sold the store to a man named Lawrence who sold it to Phineas Harrington, one of the rancho's original squatters. Lemuel G. Peel was the owner of the landmark structure when it closed in 1872, after which it was used as a residence by several families and ultimately used as a hay barn. Edited by Susan Sperry

Early Moraga family history in Alta California

Joaquin's grandfather, Lieutenant Don Jose (Joseph) Joaquin Moraga, only 5 feet 2 inches tall, was courageous and brave in battle, in charting unexplored lands and defending new colonies against Indian attacks. In fear of the encroachment of the English and Russians in Alta California in 1775, Juan Bautista Anza, commandante of the presidio in Sonora, Mexico chose Jose Joaquin Moraga to join him on the trek north to meet this threat. Once in Monterey, Anza returns to Mexico City and leaves Moraga in charge. On June 17, 1776 Moraga and a party of colonists and soldiers sail from Monterey to the future site of San Francisco with supplies for a new community. As "Commandante" Moraga supervised the selection of a location for the presidio, supervised its construction and provided leadership. He also built a ramada (a roof supported by poles) which would become Mission Dolores. Many consider Moraga the "Founder of San Francisco". In 1777, Moraga founded a second mission, Santa Clara Mission, and in 1778 founded the pueblo of San Jose. In 1781, his family joined him in Los Angeles and by 1785 Jose Joaquin Moraga had died at the age of 44. He is buried at Mission Dolores

Joaquin's father, Lieutenant Gabriel Antonia Moraga was born at the Sonora presidio in 1765 but missed the trek to San Francisco because his mother was ill. Little is known of his childhood, but we know he could read and write because of the journals he kept. He enlisted in the Spanish army on December 1, 1783 and was married at Mission Dolores on August 2, 1784. He served from presidio to mission to pueblo. His fifth child was born on May 28, 1793 at the mission in Soledad and was Jose Joaquin Moraga de la Santisima Trinidad Moraga (Joaquin Moraga). In 1793 Gabriel was appointed Mayor of San Jose. Because of his success here, he was given orders to establish San Cruz and serve as the pueblo's first mayor. From 1800 to 1819 he was sent to many missions to quell Indian attacks. During this time of exploration Gabriel can be credited with exploring and naming the Kings, San Joaquin, Mariposa, Merced, Stanislaus, Tuolumne, Cosumnes, American, Sacramento, Calaveras and Feather Rivers. After the death of his first wife, Gabriel remarried and in total fathered 14 children. He retired in 1823 but died on June 14, 1823 and is buried at Mission Santa Barbara. He had served in the military for 40 years and reached the level of lieutenant.

Jose Joaquin Moraga de la Santisima Trinidad Moraga (Joaquin Moraga) was never involved in any activity important enough to be recorded in any diaries or narratives. Unlike his father he did not keep a journal because he could not read or write. He only served minor positions with routine duties at the Presidio in San Francisco, Mission Santa Cruz and Monterey Presidio. He resigned from the Royal Spanish Army in 1819. For the next seven years Joaquin and his wife had six children and lived in the San Jose valley where Joaquin remained a superintendent of fields in charge of the herds and flocks for Mission San Jose.

In 1835 Joaquin Moraga and his cousin Juan Bernal formally requested a land grant from Governor Alvarado in return for "long, unpaid military service". A common practice since Mexico passed a law in 1828 authorizing such grants, Moraga and Bernal were granted **Rancho Laguna do los Palos Colorados** in 1841.

The Moraga Historical Society reappeared September 25th at the Moraga Pear and Wine Festival! President Susan Sperry and Vice President Colleen Lund greeted cheerful Festival goers with a variety of stories, merchandise and membership applications. On Sale were throw blankets for \$58, *Moraga's Pride* for \$28 and *Images of America: Moraga* \$20.



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