

The Moraga Historical Society

2022 SECOND Quarter

MORAGA MEMORIES-YESTERDAY, TODAY, TOMORROW

Moraga Historical Society

(925) 377-8734

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By John A. Kaiser, Moraga Historical Society Digital Assets Coordinator

The **Moraga History Center**, located at the western end of the Moraga Library, is the home for a collection of physical artifacts and historical documents volunteers have meticulously collected, catalogued and archived since the establishment of the **Moraga Historical Society** in 1965. The history center is open for visitors Thursdays from 1-3 pm or by appointment. Items may be examined at the center and photocopied or scanned but not borrowed. In 2019 MHS undertook a redesign of the **MHS Web Site** and in 2020 the husband-wife team of Susan Skilton, an MHS director since the early 2000's, and John Kaiser, took charge of updating and expanding the new web site. MHS now has a Twitter account (@MoragaHistory) which will be used to notify followers about new web site material and upcoming MHS events.



RESOURCES ▾

History Center

Key People Archives

Key Subject Archives

Library Author Catalog

Library Subject Catalog

Maps

Repositories

The broader goal is to enable the residents of Moraga to become more familiar with the history of their town and surrounding area, the intermediate goal is to populate the web site with photographs and articles to facilitate online research of Moraga's history, and the immediate goal is to make it easier for people already interested in history to understand the resources available at the history center and prepare for a research visit. The grander, long-term goal is to digitize the paper assets so that we not only preserve the past from destruction by fire and make it available online, but also to prepare the foundation for a Metaverse style future that enables individuals with the help of augmented reality to experience what Moraga once looked like. John Kaiser became an MHS director in 2021 in his role as "digital assets coordinator".

MORAGA HISTORY ▾
In the News
Turning Points
Walking Tours
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Joaquin Moraga Adobe
Past Events
People
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Pears in California

The **Resources** section of the web site is designed to help people research Moraga's history. We now have online indices for 3 major resources at the Moraga History Center. The **Key People Archives** web page lists 130 individuals along with birth-death years and background notes for whom we have folders in our Biographical Files cabinets. The **Key Subject Archives** web page lists over 2,000 subjects which have folders in our Vertical Files. Our **Library** shelves hold 480 books organized by author; our online catalogs list them alphabetically by author and by subject. Still to come are online indices for our map, slide, photo and audio recording collections. The Repositories web page is a list of Bay Area historical societies with links to their web sites.

The **Moraga History** section of the web site is where you go directly for information about Moraga's history in the form of images and articles. **In the News** lists articles going back to 2009 mainly published by **Lamorinda Weekly** which discuss Moraga history or efforts to preserve historical sites such as the **Joaquin Moraga Adobe**. Each article links to a pdf hosted by the LW web site.

Turning Points is a collection of articles about the major stages of Moraga's evolution into its present form. **Walking Tours** is where you find a list of historical "guided" tours, each of which has its own web page with map, information, and images. The **Moraga Townsite Walking Tour** was posted in March 2022. **Historical Sites** links to pages dedicated to specific historical sites. Although the **Joaquin Moraga Adobe** sits outside Moraga it is a major part of Moraga's history and now has its own dedicated web site run by the **Friends of Adobe**. **Past Events** is a list of MHS banquet, potluck, and speaker events for which we are gradually assembling photo collections. **People** is where we feature articles about people who have made a difference in Moraga history and for the Moraga Historical Society. While a primary focus of the MHS has been the Moraga family which settled the area, the later transformation is fascinating in its own right and the **Infrastructure** section covers the history of railways, roads, water systems and byways. And, of course, what Moraga than its pear orchards?

The collage consists of three distinct pages related to Moraga's history:

- Left Page:** The cover of the "El Rancho Moraga Quarterly" newsletter, Volume LIII, Winter & Spring 2018, Number 1&2. It features the Moraga Historical Society logo and lists the Interim Editor as Bill Lund and the Production Staff as Colleen & Bill Lund. The tagline is "History Becomes Us".
- Middle Page:** A "Table of Contents" page listing various articles and their page numbers, including "President's Winter & Spring Letter", "Membership", "Women's Suffrage Comes to California", and "My Life in Objects: The Wilcox and Gibbs Sewing Machine".
- Right Page:** An article titled "Eliza J. Berry Headstone in Moraga" from "The Moraga Historical Society". It includes a photograph of a headstone and discusses the life of Eliza J. Berry, a young wife of John J. Berry who died in San Francisco at the completion of the Golden Gate Bridge.

The History Center has a collection of newsletters and quarterlies going back more than 50 years edited by MHS members which describe MHS related events and include history articles. Because they

exist only on paper, we are scanning these newsletters and posting them online as pdf files in the **Newsletter** section. We have marched back to 2012 but there remains a long way to go. The plan is to isolate as extracts those articles focused on Moraga. The new quarterly newsletter has an easy to print format that replaces the El Rancho booklet. Follow us on Twitter (@MoragaHistory) so that you can be notified when it its available online.



The new MHS web site has a **PayPal Store** that allows you to buy products online such as **The Moraga California Throw, Note Cards, Moraga's Pride** and **Images of America - Moraga**. Place your order online and we will ship it wherever you wish. If your children have moved away either of these books could be a well appreciated gift.

Rose Lee Tom, a long-time resident of Moraga, California, died Monday, January 24, 2022 in Gilroy, California. She was 94 years old.

Rose was born in Oakland, California on March 11, 1927, the youngest of four children and the only one of the family to be born in the United States. She attended schools in Oakland and graduated from Oakland Technical High School in 1945. She next attended UC Berkeley and received her Bachelor of Science degree in January 1949. While at Cal she met her soon-to-be husband John, an engineering student who had just been discharged from the Army. They were married on Easter Sunday in 1949.

Rose and John raised their family in Oakland, and she became sons' school. She would help in the classrooms, driving students even teaching the class the art of Chinese paper folding. She Scout den mother and joined the Jefferson Elementary School was president for many years. In 1996 the family moved to continued as a school volunteer. Rose became involved in other activities by joining the Femeiners (a group of wives of civil Scottish Rite Ladies Club, and help found the Moraga Garden Club. She served as president of all three. She was active in the Moraga Historical Society, volunteered at the Moraga Library and served as an elder at Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church. After her sons had both graduated from college Rose got her real estate license and worked for many years as a realtor. With John she traveled around the world on land and ship cruises, visiting all continents with the exception of Antarctica. In 2019 she and John moved into Merrill Gardens, a senior community in Gilroy CA, to be nearer to her eldest son Larry.

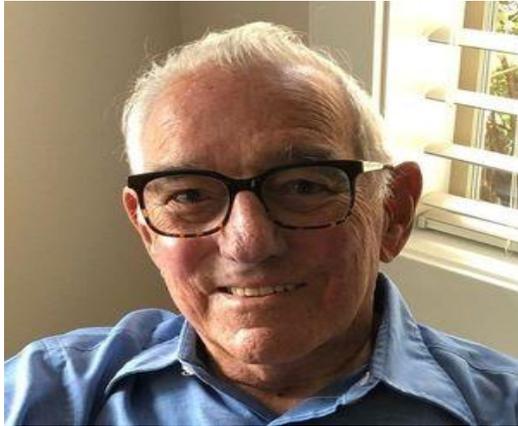


discharged from very active in their on field trips and served as a Cub PTA where she Moraga where she community engineers), the



John "Dan" Rego, age 94, died February 20, 2022 in Oregon

John Daniel "Dan" Rego was born in Oakland California on October 20, 1927, the same day as his twin brother Dave, to John and Meriam Rego. Dan attended



Luther Burbank Jr. High and Oakland Technical High School. Dan attended the University of California at Berkeley for one year, but a hernia forced him to withdraw early, and once completely mended, he went to work for Howell Rexall Drugs at 18th and Broadway in Oakland as a stock boy.

In September of 1948, Dan and his best friend Roger Vaughn attended a dance where Roger introduced him to a pretty girl he knew, Nilda Peruzzo. Neither Dan nor Nilda were good dancers, but they must have connected because at the end of the evening, she gave him her phone number. Dan convinced Nilda to marry him in November 1949.

Shortly thereafter in 1950, Dan was hired by Universal Pump, a division of Jacuzzi Bros, Inc., where Nilda's father worked. That same year the first of their six children (and only daughter) Jackie was born. In 1951 Dan was tapped to open the new Jacuzzi office in Portland Oregon, so he and Nilda and the baby moved north to start a new home where over the next 12 years the five boys would be born.

With a growing family to support, Dan traveled across the west selling whirlpool bath equipment first as a sales engineer for Universal, then as a sales representative for Jacuzzi Research, Inc.

In 1969 Dan's job with Jacuzzi was relocated to the Bay Area, and the family moved to Moraga where they quickly immersed themselves as active members of the

community. In 1975, after 25 years with Jacuzzi, Dan left the company and at the age of 48 started a new career selling life insurance for John Hancock.

Dan retired in the mid-1990's. He bought a golf cart and spent many hours on the links with his golf buddies. A long-standing member of Kiwanis, Dan was elected president of Moraga Kiwanis and Lt. Governor for Kiwanis. He was active in local politics and ran for the local town council. Dan served as Chair of the Moraga Parks Commission and President of the Moraga Parks and Recreation Foundation, and during his tenure, he chaired the development of the Moraga Commons bandshell. Dan was also President of the Moraga Historical Society, President of Hacienda Seniors, and in 1999, Dan was voted Citizen of the Year in Moraga for his "tireless and exceptional record of service to the community."

Dan was a craftsman and an avid woodworker when they moved to Moraga in 1969. As grandchildren started arriving, Dan began building wooden toys for them, and they were so good that he made dozens more to sell at the Alameda Crafts Fair.

Dan and Nilda moved back to Oregon in 2015. They loved to travel and went all over the world including Canada, St. Petersburg, all over Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and South America. They loved to spend time in Hawaii where Dan's father was born and where his great grandfather immigrated to from the Azores.

Dan loved to volunteer and knew how to work a crowd, whether selling hamburgers at a St. Mary's College basketball or football game or selling raffle tickets at the annual auction for Phi Sigma Kappa fraternity at UC Berkeley where his sons were members, for which he was awarded an Honorary Phi Sig membership.

For all his activities, awards and accomplishments, Dan loved nothing more than to be around his family. You could often hear him say whether on the back deck at home or on the lanai in Hawaii sipping a scotch with one of his sons or daughters-in-law that there was nothing better in the world than to be with family.

His was a life well-lived, and at the end of the day, Dan's legacy is a close-knit family and dozens of friends that loved him and will miss him dearly.

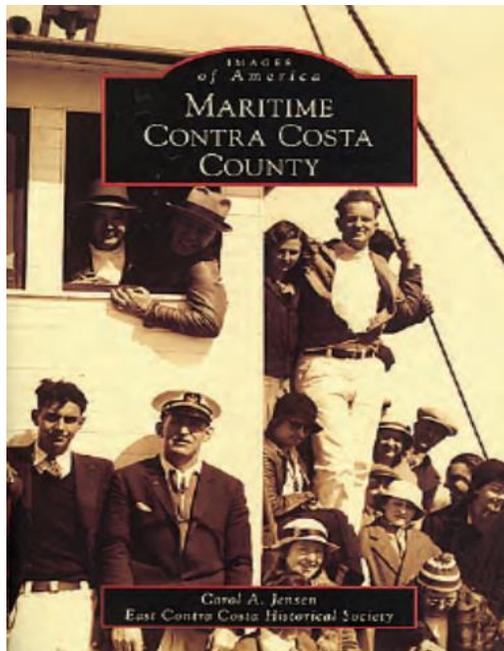
Welcome New and Returning Members to the Historical Society

Bill & Trudy Ausfahl, Larry & Ellen Beans, Matt & Wendy Bell, Joan Bruzzone, Bob & Sally Church, John & Judi Cooper, Paul & Mary Cowan, John & Mary Sue Erickson, Elsie Falconer, Helen Furlow, John & Darlene Haffner. Steve Hansen, John & Marguerite Harrell, Chuck & Febe Harrington, Sue Holmes. James & Sandra Holst, Shun-Fel & Karina Hou, Gary & Carol Irwin, Anne Johnson, Vera Kochan, Bonnie Krames, Kendall Langan, Elaine Lind, Mo Livermore, Ron Louis, Carole Lucas, Bill & Colleen Lund, Jean Manuel, Jodi Martin, Elsie Mastick, Fran Matthews, David & Marianne McKay, John Minney & Susan Cliff, Gordon & Gail Nathan, Dick & Candace Olsen, John & Teresa Onoda, Jon & Kathy Ranstrom, Nilda Rego, Maria Rieger, Jeff Schwartz, Jerry & Jan Siebert, Susan Skilton & John Kaiser, Maggie Skinner, Igor & Rita Sobolev, Bob & Virginia Sornsen, Sam & Susan Sperry, Deborah & David Trotter, Brian & Ann Wagenbach, Clark Wallace, Michael & Pam Williams, Pete & Pat Williams, Marjorie Zedaker.

Maritime Contra Costa County

Thursday, May 12, 2022 at 7:30 p.m.

**in the Moraga Library Community Room
1500 St. Mary's Road, Moraga, CA 94556
A Presentation by Carol A. Jensen**



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

After you read John Kaiser's article describing our website, I hope you will take the time to check it out! John has visions of digitalizing our archives, setting up YouTube and Twitter and taking a new direction for the Society.

Recently, while working with a Board member, we discovered many more treasures in our History Center. Besides a plethora of photos and articles about our Town and its early settlers and historic sites, there is an abundance of research projects with valuable history of Moraga's early days! The historic information in my article "Life in the Moraga Valley from 1849 to 1870" was edited from a Thesis for California State University, Hayward written by Donald D. Walker, April 1989. Other such thesis topics can be found in the History Center.

With the return of the 4th of July, and Pear and Wine Festivals, the Moraga Historical Society will again be present to sell our wares, tell historical stories, and gather new members. Look for us at the Common in July and September.

Life in the Moraga Valley from 1849-1870

In 1849 there was no Town of Moraga, just a traditional frontier settlement of people trying to become an identifiable community. Although many of the inhabitants may have initially come to California in search of gold, when they migrated to the Moraga Valley their ambitions became more conventional and conservative. Their sole desire was to own land that they believed was "free for the taking". However, these ambitions were later thwarted by a land grabbing lawyer named Horace Carpentier.

Most of the early Moraga settlers were young men in their twenties and thirties, and women were few-in-number. These "adventurers" were farmers, clerks, merchants, teachers, preachers, and gamblers. Many were not of little means as passage from the East required an outlay of several hundreds of dollars.

By 1852 the days of pick and shovel mining were over. The wealthy left and returned home. Those who did not have enough money to return home spread out over California, taking jobs where they could. There was a substantial group who saw agriculture or business ahead in this yet unsettled country. To the ex-miners was added the increasing number of immigrants who were attracted by reports that California offered many other opportunities to people looking for a place to settle.

Between 1852 and 1854 the first settlers found their way to the Moraga Valley. In 1852 Zelotas Reed, Lewis Masson, Frank Hostetter and J.D. Allen were among the first settlers. In 1853 a man named Immer settled on the "tule patch" (Campolindo field), and in 1854 William Southard, Jackson and Wilson Gann, Jack Allen, Jesse Williams, George and David Meacham, Phineas Harrington, Edward Curry, William Brown, John Courter, and John Merrill had moved into the Indian Creek vicinity (Indian Valley). Legally these settlers in the Moraga Valley were "squatters" but they came before the title to the Moraga/Bernal land grant was confirmed by the United States government. Many of those who came falsely believed property ceded by Mexico was now public property of the United States.

It brought much consternation to Joaquin Moraga to watch these "squatters" occupy his land and run their livestock on the grasslands and hilltops. Unable to read or write, and speaking no English, Moraga probably had little understanding of his rights under American law, and it would have been difficult to find any law enforcement agency that would intercede in his behalf. These "squatters" took their choice of the land, selecting the flattest portions which were more suitable for farming. John Merrill settled on land which is now St. Mary's College; Zelotas Reed on the hills to the south; the Meacham brothers to the west, and Williams settled the land on the present-day Hacienda site. Southard, Harrington, and Gann settled on the present-day Moraga Shopping Center area.

The new settlers who came to the Moraga Valley were innovative and promoted agriculture by improving methods, diversifying crops, increasing productivity, and upgrading their livestock. The rancheros could not keep up with these new farm techniques. That fact and the many, diverse financial problems of the Moraga family led to the dismantling of the Rancho de los Palos Colorados! They tried to continue their free and easy lifestyle after the settlers came but the fiestas and fandangos began to fade.

The initial years for these settlers were lean, filled with back-breaking work and hardships. Wells had to be dug, shelter built, planting done, and fences built. The shortage of rain from March to November was another problem. The fact that Moraga lies in an irregularly shaped bowl, creating a natural barrier, made it remote from the population areas of Oakland and San Francisco. More easily accessed were Martinez, Pacheco, Concord, and Walnut Creek. Even these towns were two to four hours away by horseback or wagon. Moraga residents were more dependent upon their near neighbors and thus a sense of community developed very quickly to fulfill material and social needs. Because there were no natural passes bisecting these barriers, traveling from Moraga to either the coast or the east was a formidable task in 1860. Only about half of the Moraga acreage was tillable land; the balance was used mainly for pasture of cattle and horses. Soil conditions on the flat land and gentle slopes were good for raising wheat and barley as well as gardens and orchards. With this abundance of grasslands, dairying became an important source of income.

There were relatively few trees on the Moraga landscape when the settlers first came. As today, there were coast live oaks in the ravines, and willow thicket along the creek beds. The savannas on the hill tops and slopes were covered with tall grasses, mostly wild oats, and scrub patches of coyote bush. The climate was mild, and the average rainfall was approximately twenty to thirty inches.

Moraga was once the habitat of bear, elk, and antelope. James Lamson wrote in 1854 of women and children needing protection from the bears when berry picking along the Indian Creek. He also recalled seeing flocks of as many as 50 California condors wheeling and circling the valley.

By 1860 there were 43 households with a population of 240 in the valley and adjacent hills. The median age of the home builders was thirty-three years. There was not a town "center" but most of the farms were centered around the Larch area. Much of the town's activity centered around "The store" (present day St. Monica location)) where basic supplies were purchased, mail was distributed, where poll taxes were collected, where a document could be notarized, and often it was the precinct polling place.

Before the second crops were harvested, a school was built with timbers from the redwoods to the west. Willow Spring School, twenty by thirty feet, was located at the present site of the Moraga Shopping Center with Philip Sage as the first teacher. James and Angeline Magee, although childless, donated the property for this school and the lumber bought at the local mill cost only two or three hundred dollars. In 1860, 39 children attended school. The schoolhouse also served as a place of worship.

Land values ranged from \$1.50 to \$2.00 per acre for range land and \$10 to \$15 for good tillable soil. Most farmers had a combination of crop and range land for each had milk cows, beef cattle and work animals to pasture. Several were strictly cattle and horse ranchers. Because of the demand for meat to feed the miners, beef prices were sky high, and ranching was a profitable business. Sheep and hogs were also raised by the Carrick brothers and Frank Hostetter in the acreage just east of now St. Mary's College. Initially these early pioneers were subsistence farmers, growing what they needed in their own gardens as there were only three stores in the area—Martinez, Lafayette, Alamo, plus John Courter's store in Moraga. Dairying entered the valley in the later 1850's and James Magee produced cheese. Early 1860's saw wheat and barley as a major source of cash. Moraga Valley farmers hauled their wheat to Pacheco.

The primary government authority was the county. An annual poll tax of \$3 was required of each male over the age of 21 and under the age of 80. Property taxes were based on assessed value of all land and improvements. Although violence did occur in Moraga Valley, it was not persistent, and the county sheriff handled these cases. Poor roads continued to be a problem due partly to shortages of funds and inadequate maintenance. Postal service was slow and infrequent due to the poor roads and lack of transportation. Mail from outside the Bay Area came by commercial ocean-going vessels. Local mail came by ferry to Martinez and was taken to an office in Lafayette. If a Moraga resident happened to go to Lafayette, any mail for Moraga residents was sent with said resident to the aforementioned Moraga store. There was a bag hanging from a tree outside the store for out-going mail. The local newspaper was The Contra Costa Gazette, published weekly in Pacheco.

The Moraga Valley's population stayed consistent over the 1860's. By the end of the decade the whole valley was settled, and all the arable land was under cultivation. Dairy cows grazed on the hills instead of the tough, lean Spanish cattle, lumbering oxen had been replaced by horses and mules; calves, colts, pigs, and chickens were in every barnyard. Lush fields of wheat, barley and hay covered the valley floor. Although everything looked prosperous and stable, the stability was more perceived than real. The specter of losing title to their farms and homes loomed large to all and many had already succumbed to the threat and left. Horace Carpentier, Joaquin Moraga's lawyer, had begun to successfully transition some of the "squatters" into sharecroppers. This shrewd lawyer had now become owner of much of the original rancho



Jesse Williams and his family arrived in Moraga in 1854 and lived on the site of the present-day Hacienda de los Flores for over fifty years. It was the only piece of the Rancho delos Palos Colorados never relinquished to Horace Carpentier. The story is told that when Carpentier appeared on Williams' property to take possession, Williams with shotgun in hand refused to give in. The Williams family lived on this land until 1904 when his son sold to the Lucas family. In later years this property became the Donald Rheem Estate.

Pictured here is Albert (Jesse's son), his wife Jennie Morrow Kendall and their daughters.

Moraga Historical Society
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