

The Moraga Historical Society

2023 SECOND QUARTER

MORAGA MEMORIES-YESTERDAY, TODAY, TOMORROW

Trains Through Moraga

Sam Sperry

44 Years of Train Service

Beginning in 1913 and ending in 1957, our sparsely settled and not-yet incorporated community of Moraga was served by an all-electric train system which provided both passenger and freight service. For the first 15 years, the trains serving Moraga and vicinity were known as the Oakland, Antioch & Eastern Railway (the OA&E), which operated between Oakland and Sacramento. Then, in 1928, the Western Pacific Railroad (the WP) acquired both the OA&E and another all-electric system named the Northern Electric Railway (the NE), which operated between Sacramento and Chico. The WP merged the two into a single 185-mile-long all-electric railroad operation from Chico to Oakland which it named the Sacramento Northern Railway (the SN).



The *Moraga* car, a passenger favorite

The Two Train Stops in Moraga

At the outset, there was only one train stop in Moraga. Known as the **Moraga Station**, it was comprised of both a passenger depot and substantial freight facilities located across from the Moraga Barn on today's Viader Drive (formerly Railroad Avenue). Passengers included commuters traveling to urban locations for work and high school students going to Mt. Diablo High School in Concord (no Lamorinda public high schools in those years). The freight facilities, accessed from a spur track, included packing sheds and warehouses for the storage of redwood lumber from Canyon and locally grown food and grain products, together with holding pens for livestock. Here the goods and animals awaited transport to Bay Area markets and to port facilities for shipment to destinations both within and outside the U.S. Especially prominent among local agricultural products were the Bartlett pears and walnuts grown in orchards planted by James Irvine's Moraga Company, established in 1913 – so much so with the pears that, for a period of time, Moraga was known as the Bartlett pear capital of the west coast!

Not until the opening of St. Mary's College (SMC) in 1928 was the second stop established in Moraga. It was a more modest facility, consisting of a passenger depot only. It was called the **St. Mary's Station**, was located on the campus and focused on passenger service, primarily for students and faculty, since there was initially little or no housing available for SMC students or faculty, either on or off the campus.

While the structures which comprised each of the two stations are gone, the location of each is now marked by a commemorative plaque placed in recent months as Eagle Scout projects. The Moraga Station plaque was installed in September 2021, by Mason Fara and is located across the street from the Moraga Barn, behind present-day OSH. The St. Mary's Station plaque was installed in September 2022, by Daniel Berkes and is located behind the backstop of the softball field. Both Mason and Daniel are boy scouts in Scouts BSA Troop 212.

The Route from Oakland Into and Through Moraga

After departing the Oakland station at 40th Street and Shafter Avenue, eastbound SN trains traveled up Shafter to connect with Broadway, and then followed Broadway up to and around Lake Temescal to travel south alongside present-day Highway 13 to Shepherd Canyon. There they turned east and traveled steeply uphill in the canyon to the western portal of the 3,000-foot-long train tunnel called the Shepherd Pass Tunnel. Upon passing through the tunnel, they exited at the eastern portal and descended to Pinehurst Road and alongside Pinehurst Road past Canyon to Canyon Road. There, they curved left to travel northeast alongside Canyon Road, and upon crossing the southern boundary of present-day Moraga, they curved left again onto the southerly extension of present-day Augusta Drive in the Moraga Country Club. Then curving right to follow the alignment of Railroad Avenue (now Viader Drive), they traveled northeast alongside Railroad, stopping at the Moraga Station. Following the stop there, the trains continued northeast through the present-day Moraga Shopping Center and Commons Park and onto the west side of today's St. Mary's Road before curving right and across the road onto the St. Mary's Campus, stopping at the St. Mary's Station. From there, the trains traveled back to St. Mary's Road, crossing it at the intersection with Bollinger Canyon Road. From that crossing point, the SN tracks traveled on right-of-way that is today's Lafayette-Moraga Regional Trail all the way into downtown Lafayette.

The Tale of Two Ends - Emergence of the Sacramento Northern Railway

As noted above, the Sacramento Northern Railway (the SN) was established in 1928 following the acquisition and merger by the WP of the separately established NE and OA&E, sometimes referred to as the North End (the NE) and the South End (the OA&E).

The North End – Service from Chico down to Sacramento was developed as the NE, first incorporated in 1905. The northern terminus of the NE in Chico consisted of a station and shops located on Mulberry Street. The first NE trip from Chico down to Oroville was in 1906, and then on down to Sacramento in 1907. The NE was reorganized in 1918 following a foreclosure sale and renamed the Sacramento Northern Railroad (name is similar, but with “Railroad” rather than “Railway”).

The South End - The commencement of OA&E service through Moraga in 1913 was made possible by completion that year of the Shephard Pass Tunnel through the Oakland Hills, beneath Skyline Boulevard. The tunnel portal on the Alameda County side was called Havens and was located in Shephard Canyon; and on the Contra Costa County side, the portal was called Eastport, situated above Pinehurst. Some of the maintenance structures that were located at Eastport are still there, but the property is now owned by the East Bay Regional Park District and, while accessible from Pinehurst Road, is closed to the public.

Train Service Through Moraga Fades into History

SN passenger service ended in 1941, as car and bus travel became the modes of choice with completion of the Bay Bridge (1937), the opening of an improved Caldecott Tunnel (1939), and the establishment of paved public roads. Freight service, on the other hand, continued for another 16 years. Demand for rail freight service during those years was led by shipment of pears, walnuts and other local agricultural products and then military

equipment, weapons and ammunition during WWII and the Korean War. Eventually a combination of expanded truck hauling, competition from other railroads and declines in local cattle ranching, farming and production of pears, walnuts and other agricultural commodities, together with the decline in military shipments, led to termination of the SN freight service in 1957; and with that, train service through Moraga faded into history.

Moraga Pear Orchard Bears Maiden Crop

What happened in Moraga Valley 100 years ago? Have you seen the pear trees around town and heard of how old they are?

The pear orchards, some still remaining in Moraga, began bearing for the first time in July 1923. To the right of the train view the orchards planted as early as 1914 with the town of Moraga near the center of this photo.

(Moraga Pear Orchard Bears Maiden Crop," *Oakland Tribune*, Volume 99, Number 11, 11 July 1923, digital image: *California Digital Newspaper Collection*, accessed March 2023.



Long time MHS Quarterly editor and friend no longer with us

After graduating from Piedmont High School in 1954, Bill Lund attended Yale University majoring in Economics. While in college he was a member of the Navy Reserve. After receipt of his B.A. in 1958, Bill was commissioned in the U.S. Navy as an Ensign. After separating from the Navy, he worked for Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company for 30 years. He received his MBA from St. Mary's College in their first Executive MBA class. After retiring from the phone company, he worked as Business Manager for the Athenian School. In 1962 Bill met Colleen and they married a short nine months later. They would have celebrated their sixty anniversary this March 30th. We remember Bill on the MHS Board as the editor of the Quarterly for many years. His attention to detail and inquisitive mind created wonderful 40-page publications four times a year. Bill precisely created our events programs. He will be missed by MHS and the Moraga Community.



Educator and friend Kathy Zuber passes



Born in Los Angeles, Kathy attended Dorsey High School where she met Ed Zuber. Kathy went on to attend The University of Southern California, graduating cum laude with a degree in Education in 1964 and was a proud member of Alpha Phi Sorority. True Gemini soulmates, Ed and Kathy married on June 22, 1963 and were married for 57 years until Ed's passing in 2020. A giver by nature, Kathy made her career in elementary school education. In 1974 she moved from a close-knit neighborhood in LA to Moraga. Kathy taught at Camino Pablo and Donald Rheem Elementary Schools where she started the Gifted and Talented program. She taught 2nd grade for over 20 years and in 1998 was awarded Teacher of the Year in the Moraga School District. She was a mentor to new teachers, offering guidance and encouragement. With Ed, she helped establish the Moraga Baseball Association. Kathy hung up her pencil and gradebook to be a full-time Nana. In retirement, Kathy helped with the Moraga School District 3rd grade visits to the Moraga Historical Society History Center describing prehistoric Moraga and life of the native Americans. Kathy delighted in telling the students about the three-toed horses that roamed the hills of Moraga.

3rd Graders return to the History Center after a three-year Break!



Colleen Lund "Daily life in Moraga in 1898"

Third grade students from Donald Rheem, Los Perales, Camino Pablo and Saklan schools returned to the History Center three consecutive Fridays in April for short lessons in the history of Moraga! The program, which began in the 1990's in the sixth grade at Joaquin Moraga, is now part of the 3rd grade curriculum. The morning is divided into three sections—one-hour for each class per school. Once at the History Center a class is divided into 3 groups, one group per room at the center. After a 15- minute mini lesson, the groups rotate until they have heard all three lessons. Contents include 1.) prehistoric/native Americans/Spanish, 2.) railroads, and 3.) ranching life. After their time at the Center the classes tour Moraga to visit the historic sites and lunch at the Commons.

(For more information see Lamorinda Weekly, April 26, 2023, or MoragaHistory.org)

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The Moraga Historical Society has several activities planned this year. All the 3rd graders from the Moraga School District and Saklan School attended the resumption of the annual History Center visit. With docents Colleen Lund, Susan Skilton, Sam Sperry and Susan Sperry, they received mini lessons on Moraga history from Prehistoric times to the ranching era.

Look for the Historical Society booth during the 4th of July celebration and the Pear and Wine Festival in September at the Commons Park. There you can ask questions about our history or purchase our wonderful books *Moraga's Pride* or *Images of America: Moraga*, or Moraga's colorful throw blanket or illustrated note cards. Memberships -\$25 family or \$15 single-can be obtained also.

Lafayette, Moraga, and Orinda Historical Societies are again planning a joint event in November at Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School. James Benny, spokesman for East Bay Hill People, will speak on the topic of preserving sites inhabited by the indigenous people of the Bay Area. He is the author of *Native American Indian Sites in the East Bay: A Guidebook*.

In the planning stage is a walk of Town historic sites. The Walking Tour created by Susan Skilton and John Kaiser would be the route taken with mini lectures along the way. Stay Tuned!

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Keith Katzman is a Moraga resident since 1966. Keith continues to show his passion for Moraga by always volunteering to help the people in Moraga and make our town one of the best places in America to live.



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