

The Moraga Historical Society

2023 THIRD QUARTER MORAGA MEMORIES-YESTERDAY, TODAY, TOMORROW

Ranching in the Moraga Valley

Susan Sperry, President Moraga Historical Society

Rancho is a Spanish word which meant, in the Spanish colonial period in the Americas, a place for raising cattle and other livestock. Most ranchos in California originated as land that the Mexican government awarded to people after the breakup of the mission system, or secularization. This is the time between the 1830's and the 1850's in which the Mexican government distributed lands that had been under the control of the missions to private individuals through a process of **land grants** from the territorial government in Alta California. The buying and selling of products made from cattle raised on these ranchos was to be known as "rancho economy". Along with the meat, cattle provided hides that could be converted into many products such as saddles/ropes, and tallow for making things such as soap and candles. The hide and tallow trade became the foundation of the rancho economy. Joaquin Moraga and Juan Bernal were rancheros, soldiers who came to the area and proved they could be capable of farming the land in a productive way.

In 1835 Joaquin Moraga and his cousin Juan Bernal were granted 13,316 acres of land known as Rancho Laguna de los Palos Colorados on which they raised approximately 1000 head of cattle and 600 horses. They traded the hides from their rancho with Yankee trading ships, which came into the San Francisco Bay, for industrial products from New England. Thus began the cattle industry in the Moraga Valley.

Disappointed gold seekers migrated to the Moraga Valley after 1849 and began squatting on the Moraga rancho. With the influx of these squatters and others who were able to obtain land before California land title was secured by Moraga/Bernal, life on the rancho changed dramatically. The Moraga family went into deep debt trying to save their land. As a result of this long saga, fourteen ranches, ranging from 63 to 175 acres, were surveyed and sold to pay these debts. These ranches went to recognizable families: Jesse Williams (Hacienda), John Merrill (Rheem Blvd./St. Mary's Road), David and George Meacham (St. Mary's Orchards), James Magee (downtown Moraga), William Southard (Canyon Road and Country Club), John Allen (Indian Valley), Nicholas Hunsaker (Burton Valley), Michael Carroll (Rheem), Edward Bosqui (Campolindo High School), Eric Madsen (across from JM), Patrick McCosker (Indian Valley), John Mulholand (Rheem Blvd), Trelut family (Bollinger Canyon) to name a few.

By 1885 Horace Carpentier owned the remaining land. The first sale of this land by Carpentier ended in foreclosure and on July 19, 1912, Charles Hooper purchased the remaining rancho land for one million dollars. By September 6, 1912, he sold James Irvine the land for \$150 an acre for a total of \$999,909.

John Sanders and Sam Carr



Most of the ranches in the early 1900's started as dairy farms/sharecroppers. Manuel Frietas came with his father in 1913 as sharecroppers and started a dairy business behind present day St. Mary's College. Milk was put in 50-gallon containers and shipped to Oakland by rail every other day except daily in the summer. The Depression forced the price of milk down and the dairy business was forced to change the operations to beef cattle. Many dairy farmers moved to the central valley when Irvine began his agribusiness in the valley because he wanted grains/crops grown on the land rather than cattle grazing. Sharecroppers were required under Irvine's ownership to pay their rent with actual crops. Manager Bill Barnes came to each ranch/farm and chose the products he wanted as rent payment.

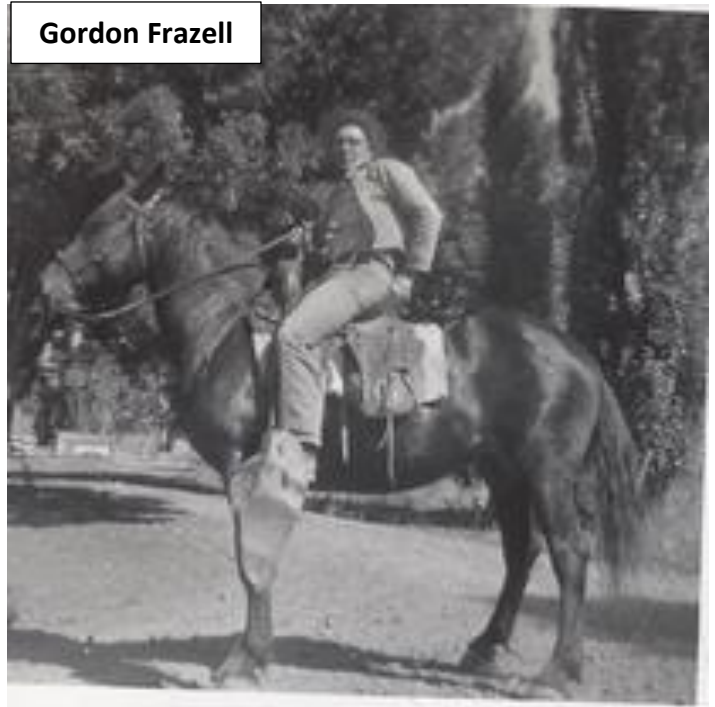
Cousins John Sanders and A.J. Carr came to the Moraga Valley from East Oakland to start ranching at the end of Camino Pablo. They purchased approximately 400 acres from Charles Hooper and over the years succeeding generations added land up to Rocky Ridge. Sanders ran about 300 head, and Carr about 150 head. In the spring calves were rounded up, branded, dehorned, and given shots against diseases. The ranchers ran mostly Herefords with a few Angus. Up until the early 1920's cattle were driven to the East Bay markets and Emeryville from Moraga to Orinda via Moraga Way and either taken through the Kennedy Tunnel or up Fish Ranch Road. They were then driven down Ashby Avenue to the slaughterhouse. This trip took its toll on weight loss and lost animals. When trucks became more reliable, the beeves were taken by truck to markets. Then, it became cheaper to ship by rail and a corral was built behind the train station, across from the BARN, conveniently near the railroad. Calves are sold at 500 pounds. During the Depression, the price fell to two cents per pound. This forced many ranchers out of business. (Today's market price is \$1.50 per pound). Sanders and Carr divided their ranch, and the Sanders family sold to subdividers. The Carr family continues to ranch this land, but the property is now protected by the John Muir Land Trust as open space.

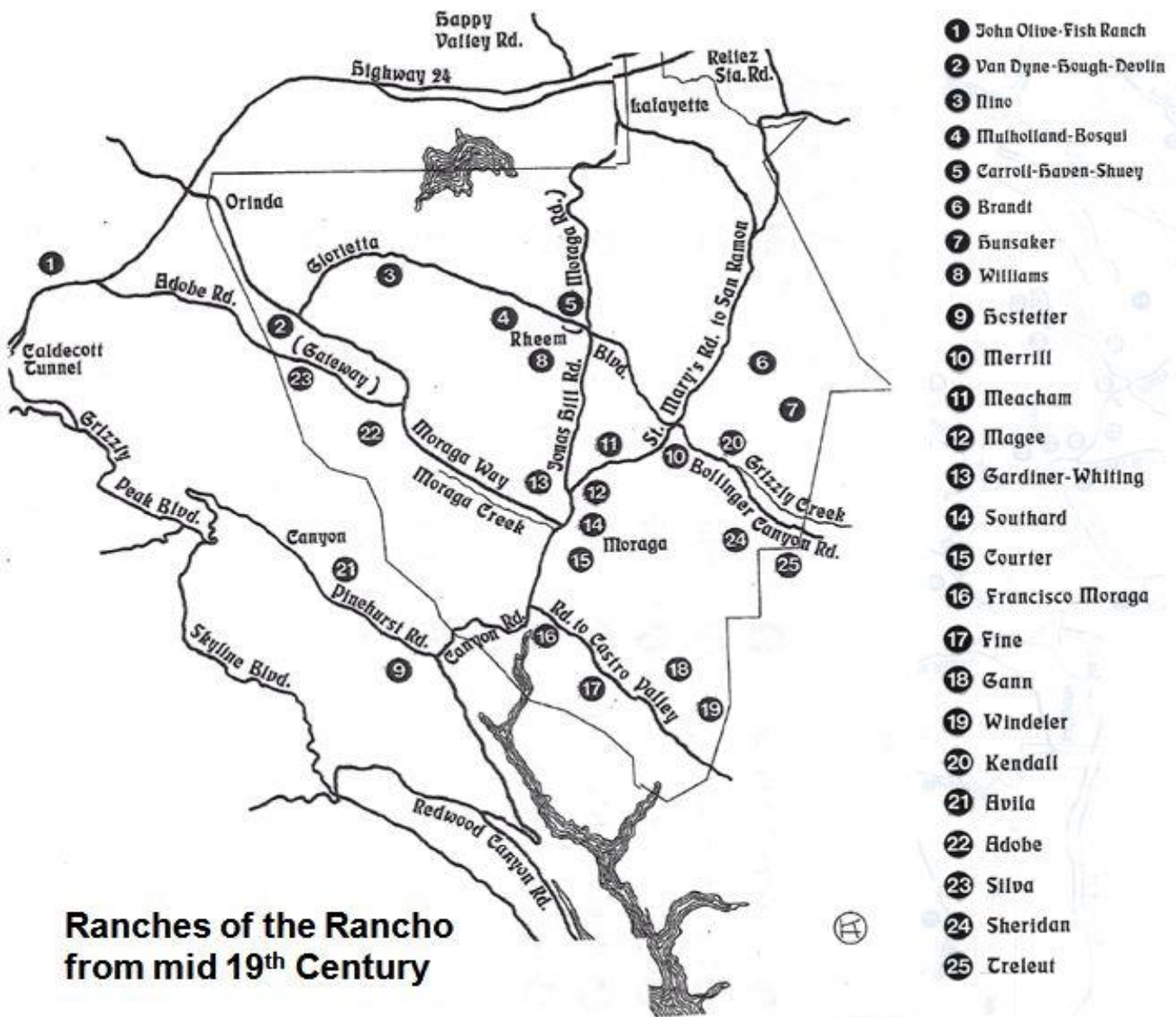
My father, Gordon Frazell, purchased 80 acres in April 1944 and established a ranch on Valley Hill Drive, off Bollinger Canyon. Over the years he leased other lands from neighbors amounting to approximately 400 acres. As a young girl I remember riding the hills with my father from Moraga to Danville, often meeting John Sanders and his team checking their herd. Years later, my daughters and their husbands joined us on the Saturday herd checking, fence mending, branding, castrating and trucking calves to market. Today we only ranch 60 acres and use an ATV to check fences and our small herd of black Angus "grass managers".

Grass lands in Moraga are mainly leased by several individuals on either privately owned land, open space or park lands.

A convergence of factors has reduced ranching in Moraga. The increased desirability of housing in our valley led to the swell of subdivisions beginning in the 1960's. Before Proposition 13, the limited profits from ranching make it difficult to pay the overwhelming property taxes. As eating habits changed, the demand for beef has decreased. Land became more valuable and long-time families began to sell out to developers. Generations of family ranchers have dwindled as interest in working the land is less desirable and profitable to the younger generation.

Gordon Frazell





Oakland Tribune, Volume 98, Number 124, 4 May 1923 p. 21

Louis Springmeyer's strawberries of 1923 in Moraga were so spectacular they were mentioned in the newspaper. Louis Springmeyer, about 50 years old in 1923, born in Nevada to parents born in Germany, lived in Moraga. He was a rancher, and was recorded in the 1920 census near Manuel Pimentel, Alfred Carr, Matt Madsen. Louis Springmeyer was a draftsman for the federal land bank.

SMC Walking Tour creator makes Eagle Scout!



Daniel Berkes, who designed and created the [St. Mary's College Walking Tour](#) as his Eagle Scout project, was among ten members of **Moraga Troop 212** who were awarded the Eagle Scout Honor on March 26, 2023. His Eagle Scout project was notable in that it focused on promoting history rather than more conventional projects building things such as park

benches or book exchange bins. Daniel's project involved researching SMC's history, establishing 3 markers on the campus acknowledging the football, train station and naval pre-flight training base history, and creating explanatory web pages accessible by scanning QR codes on the plaques placed on the campus for visitors to track down. The SMC Walking Tour is hosted by the MHS web site. He also he received the Pop Clarke Eagle Scout of the Year Award where the previous class of Eagles chooses one person from the current class to be the caretaker of the Pop Clarke Eagle pin for that year. We thank Daniel for his contribution to highlighting our local history and making it accessible to a younger generation. We wish him well as he heads to college this year.



Check out the [Third Grade Tour](#) web page to view the collection of artifacts our third graders got to see.

The Moraga Historical Society needs a Treasurer!
 Please contact the history Center at infomoragahistory.org if you are available or know of someone who can help.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

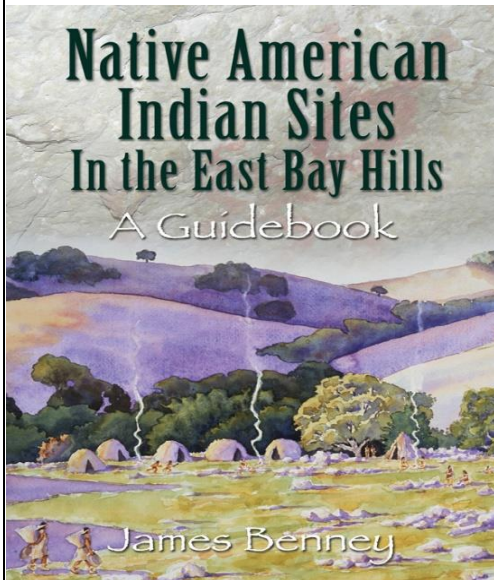
Have you checked out the Moraga Historical Society website recently? Under the leadership of John Kaiser and Susan Skilton the website has been updated and augmented (MoragaHistory.org). The homepage photos reflect the theme of the quarter's newsletter with a direct link to the most recent edition. The 3rd grade tour section has been changed to show recent docent photos and the material shown to the 3rd graders as they travel through the three stations with their teachers and parents. Did you miss one of Vera Kochan's historical articles on Moraga? Don't worry! Check [In the News](#) for all her wonderful articles. Try taking the Moraga Walking Tour created by John and Susan! Not to be missed is our upcoming talk by James Benney on Native American sites in Lamorinda. The flier advertising the program can be found on the next page. NOTE: Space is limited so register soon at ranchsusana@aol.com.

Memberships can now be purchased online from *Contact Us-Membership!*

Moraga Historical Society presents

NATIVE AMERICAN INDIAN SITES IN THE EAST BAY HILLS

Featuring James Benney



AS A SPOKESPERSON FOR THE EAST BAY HILL PEOPLE, JAMES BENNEY ENJOYS DISCOVERING AND PRESERVING HISTORIC SITES ONCE INHABITED BY THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF THE BAY AREA.

JOIN US AS HE BRINGS TO LIFE THE LOCATIONS OF THESE ANCIENT HABITATS

SUNDAY, AUGUST 20, 2023

CASITA AT THE MORAGA HACIENDA

2100 DONALD DRIVE, MORAGA

1-3 PM

RSVP TO SUSAN SPERRY @ RANCHSUSAN@AOL.COM

BY AUGUST 15TH

LAMORINDA HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERS FREE, GUESTS \$5

REFRESHMENTS

RESERVATIONS ONLY

LIMITED SEATING

Moraga Historical Society
P. O. Box 103
Moraga, California 94556



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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