The Moraga Historical Society

2022 THIRD QUARTER MORAGA MEMORIES-YESTERDAY, TODAY, TOMORROW

THE FIRST OF THE LAND BARONS

EDITED BY SAM AND SUSAN SPERRY

Horace W. Carpentier was a Columbia University educated lawyer who had left New York in 1849, arriving in San Francisco at the height of the gold rush. He practiced law in San Francisco for two years before his quest for land began. He and two partners, Edson F. Adams and Andrew J. Moon crossed the bay from San Francisco and in 1850 began to lay out the "town" of Oakland, then known as Contra Costa with a population of 70, in the area west of Lake Merritt through a series of "slick tricks". They succeeded in acquiring a great deal of land in Oakland, including the Oakland waterfront, moving eastward to the Moraga property and then the rancho lands in the Danville area. By 1868, Carpentier agreed to transfer his rights to the waterfront to a new entity, the Oakland Waterfront Company making himself president of the entity.

Carpentier was elected in 1853 to the State Assembly, the first mayor of the Town of Oakland in1854 (at age 29) and engineered the establishment of Alameda County as an entity separate from what had been Contra Costa. An unsuccessful bid for the Democratic nomination as attorney general for California ended his political career and for the next ten years, he was president of the California State Telegraph Company which built the state's first telegraph system. He was also president of the Overland Telegraph Company which linked California with the East Coast, and a director of the Bank of California. In 1880 he returned to New York where he died in 1918 at the age of 94. At the time of his death, he was both applauded and vilified. He was applauded as a philanthropist bequeathing one million dollars to both Columbia University and Barnard College, and $200,000 to the University of California, Berkeley.

The vilification was local and stemmed primarily from the manner in which, over a period of 40+ years, he acquired ownership of virtually all of the Rancho Laguna de los Palos Colorados land (the Rancho) originally granted to Joaquin Moraga and Juan Bernal. Carpentier's scheme for achieving this required cash, legal knowledge, and patience. He had an abundance of each of these resources.

Beginning in the 1850's, he first bought up defaulted mortgage loans which had been given to various lenders by Bernal heirs and then proceeded to foreclose, thereby acquiring title to the Bernal share of ownership of the Rancho. In this process, he became a co-owner with farmers who had initially moved onto portions of the land as squatters and who had then bought the Moraga share of ownership of their respective farms through an 1857 probate sale following Moraga's death. These farmers, who wrongly believed that they had acquired clear title to the full ownership of their land, included John Gardiner, Lenora Nelson, James Magee, John Fine, George and David Carrick, W.F. Merrill, William Southard, and Frank Hostetter (the Farmers).

Then, in 1862, Carpentier initiated County Superior Court proceedings to (a) authoritatively establish his ½ ownership and (b) invalidate ownership claims of Hugh O'Donnell, an Oakland land speculator and lender who had loaned money to the Moragas and Bernals. However, O'Donnell's mortgage was subordinate to the mortgages on which Carpentier had foreclosed, thereby wiping out the O'Donnell claim. Following these successful court proceedings, Carpentier then proceeded to buy the ½ interest of the respective Farmers, most of whom still owned their equipment and livestock and therefore chose to stay on their lands as tenant farmers.

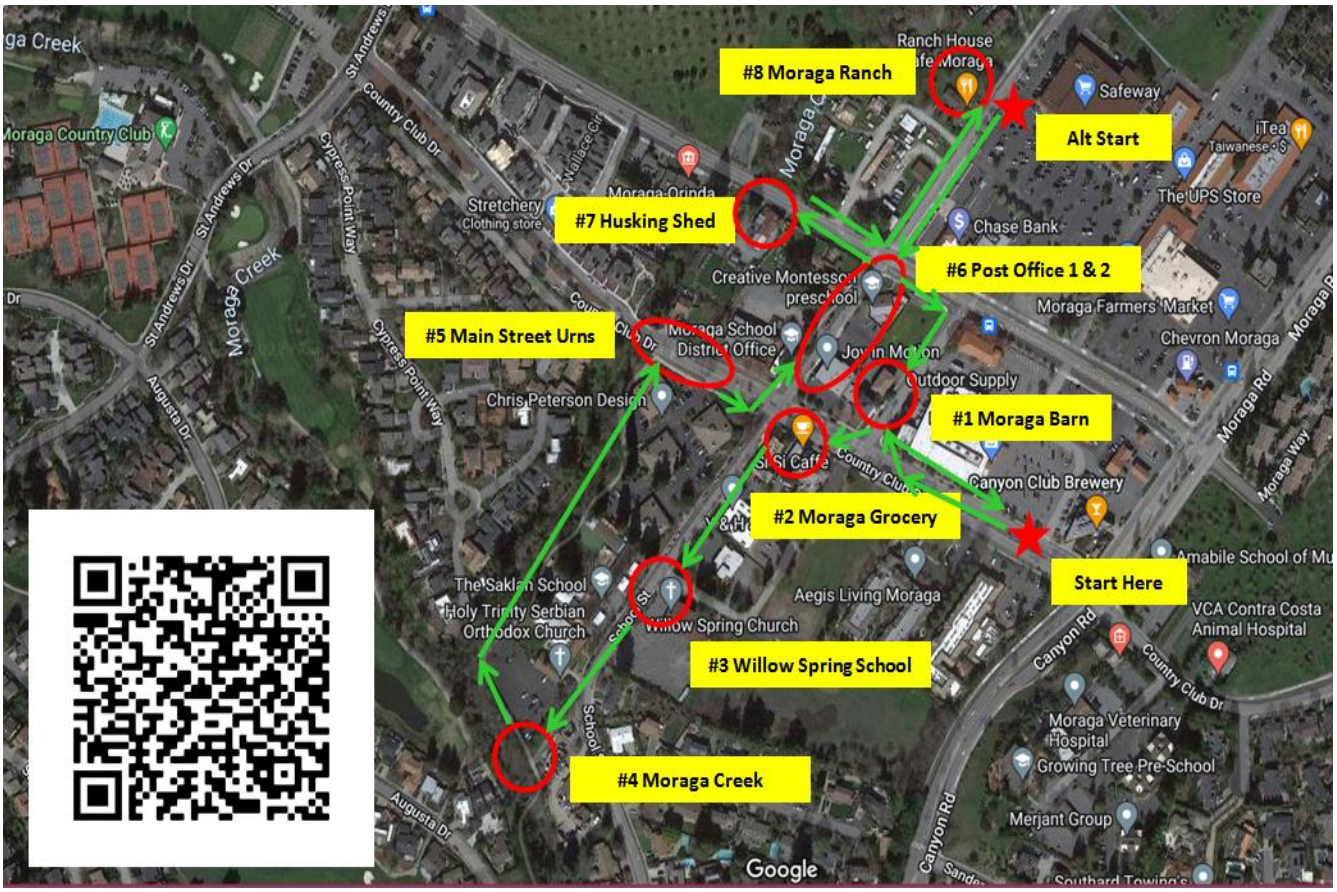
In 1889, now living in New York and prior to his 1918 death, Carpentier sold the Rancho to the Moraga Land Association, only to then foreclose and repurchase in 1899.This one-man ownership by Carpentier set the demographic pattern for Moraga for the next 75 years.

Old Moraga Town Site Walking Tour

Created by John Kaiser and Susan Skilton

MHS board members Susan Skilton and John Kaiser created a Walking Tour of the Old Moraga Town Site available on our MHS Web Site. You can also access it directly by scanning the QR code below with your smart phone. Each site stop has its own web page with photographs and comments.

Start your Old Moraga Town Site Walking Tour near the Canyon Club Brewery where Country Club Drive intersects with Moraga Road. There is plenty of parking on Country Club Drive. Follow the walking tour guide until its completion at the Moraga Ranch buildings. The Moraga Ranch House Cafe is a good place to take a break. To return to the Canyon Club starting point you can retrace the Walking Tour or take the shortest route back by heading south on School St, turning left on Moraga Way, right on Viader Drive, and left on Country Club Drive. Alternatively, you can start at the Safeway parking lot opposite Moraga Ranch Stop 8 and follow the route in reverse or walk toward Moraga Barn Stop 1 and follow the route as presented. If you linger a couple minutes at each stop, this walking tour, which is about 1.5 miles, will take you 35-45 minutes to complete. A more detailed description is on the web site.



Stop 1 Moraga Barn: 925 County Club Drive

Stop 2 Moraga Grocery: 910 Country Club Drive

Stop 3 Willow Spring School II: 1689 School Street

Stop 4 Moraga Creek: EBMUD Water Supply Station

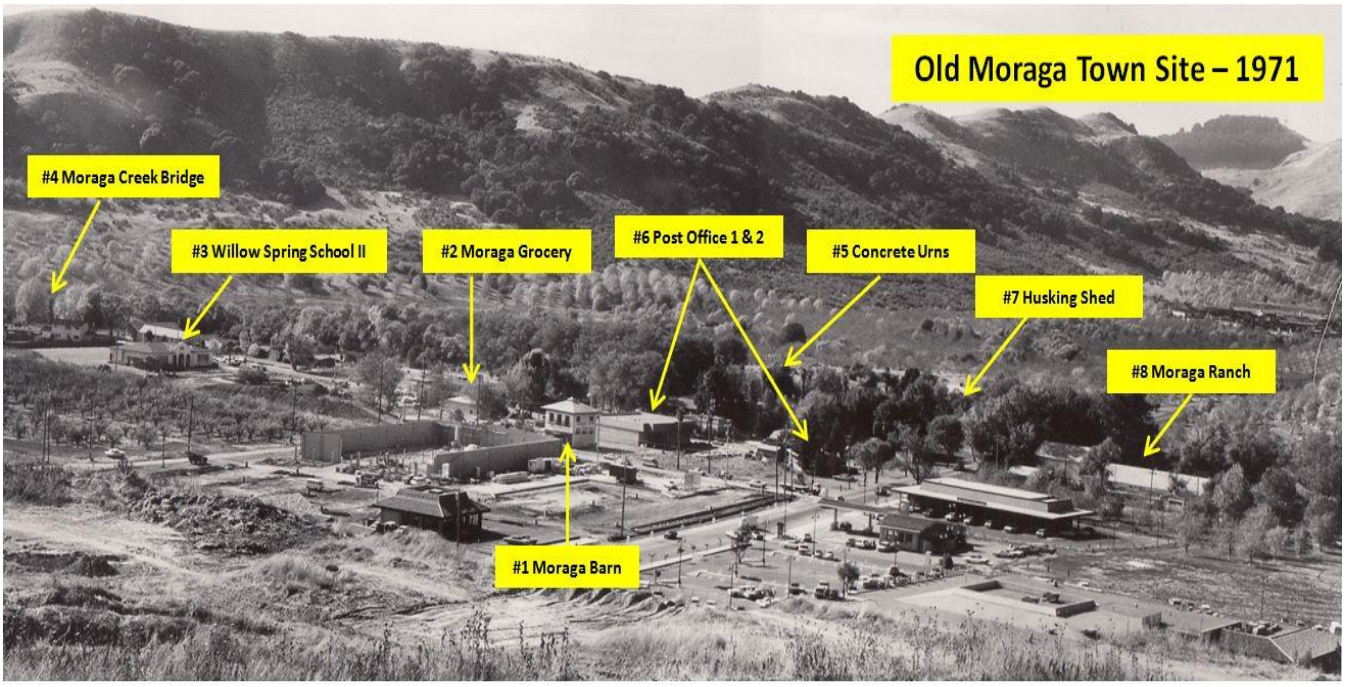
Stop 5 Concrete Urns Median of Country Club Drive

Stop 6 Former Post Offices: #1 at 1850 Moraga Way and #2 at 1545 School Street

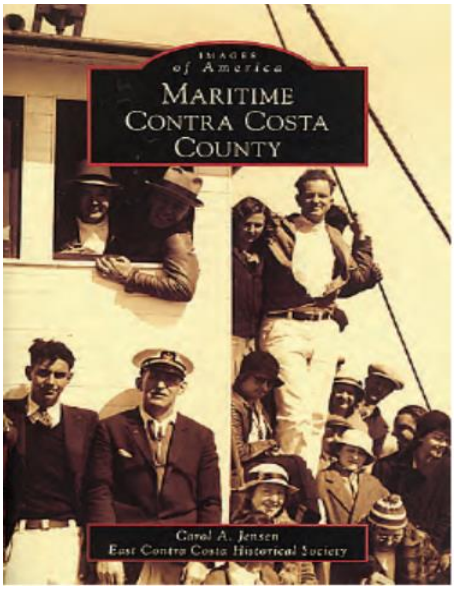
Stop 7 Husking Shed: 209 Moraga Way

Stop 8 Moraga Ranch Buildings (Moraga Company): 1012 School Street

(Taking the walking tours is entirely voluntary and participants assume the full risks associated with the activities. The Moraga Historical Society and the individual members of this group make no representation or warranties about the quality, safety, or supervision of these activities. Be safe, use sidewalks and cross at intersections.)



The Old Moraga Town Site was an ambitious undertaking in 1913 by James Irvine's Moraga Company which never flourished. Only a few buildings were developed of which even fewer remain standing today. By 1935 the Moraga Valley had reverted to an agricultural region growing a variety of fruit, vegetable and grain crops among which pears and walnuts can still be seen today in the form of fading, wild orchards. When the development of Moraga resumed during the 1950s the old town site remained relatively unchanged until the 1970s. Russell Bruzzone undertook development of the Moraga Center. The Old Town Site Walking Tour has been designed to help people contemplate and ponder what Moraga could have become and to visualize what Moraga Valley and the surrounding area once looked like prior to Moraga's incorporation as a town in 1974. We provided a snapshot background (on the main page) of the stages in Moraga's evolution until its incorporation in 1974. For more detail we recommend ***Moraga's Pride*** by Sandy Kimball republished in 1981, and for an annotated visual tour we recommend ***Images of America – Moraga*** by MHS member Susan Skilton published in 2017. Both are available through our **MHS Store** or at our **History Center**. Please send feedback to **info@moragahistory.org** and follow us on Twitter **(@MoragaHistory**).



Guest Speaker Series Resumes

Finally able to overcome the county's COVID mandates, the Moraga Historical Society's first guest speaker in two years was Carol A. Jensen, Brentwood resident and author of "Images of America: Maritime Contra Costa County".

The May 12 presentation, complete with slides, attracted buffs to the Moraga Library's Community Room for an almost two hours information-packed lecture. The main topic of discussion was the long history behind Contra Costa County's deep-water ports. Thanks to the joining of the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers near Suisun Bay, agricultural, mineral and manufactured goods in the area helped to shape the wealth of San Francisco.

President's Message

". . . it was very invigorating to see Moraga Historical Society interacting with a community I now think is primed to embrace its home as not just a path to the future, but something whose past becomes a tree one climbs to see the future," emphasizes John Kaiser after our 4th of July experience at the Commons! This renewed event brought our community together again after our COVID years and it was wonderful talking to neighbors, friends and making new connections as we displayed our wares. We are looking to you, our active members, to help us increase our membership. On the back of this newsletter is a membership form. Please ask one of your friends to join and provide the form to fill out and mail back! The dues provide us with revenue to maintain the History Center, upgrade our website, invite guest speakers, and continue digitalizing our archives.

Society to Hold Drawing on the 4th of July and at the Pear and Wine Festival

Courtesy of Susan Skilton, author of "*Images of America: Moraga*", the Society will conduct a drawing for two vouchers from Ancestry. 1.) A free Ancestry DNA kit and 2.) a Free 1-year World Explorer Membership to Ancestry will be the prizes. Tickets are being sold at the Pear and Wine Festival. Tickets are $1 each or 6 for $5. The drawing of the lucky winners will take place after the Pear and Wine Festival, September 24, 2022.

For more information/to buy tickets, contact Susan Sperry at 925-376-3053 or ranchsusan@aol.com

LAST OF THE LAND BARONS

Edited by Susan Sperry

In 1889 Carpentier sold his land to General James A. Williamson and Angus Archibald Grant, forming the Moraga Land Association. They planned to develop Moraga into town lots and small ranches and extend the California and Nevada Railroad from the Orinda Crossroads through Moraga to Lafayette. The project failed! The yellow house on Moraga Way was to be the workers quarters for the Railroad.

In 1912 the land sold to Charles Hooper and The Charles A. Hooper Company. He sold parcels of land while renting the remaining property to sharecroppers. He quickly sold most the land to James Irvine who established the Moraga Company. The largest landowner in California, Irvine was not a well-liked man. He turned the Rancho into a vast agribusiness.

The change from small time farming to large scale corporate ranching was overwhelming for the farmers and the land. Sharecroppers could no longer use their farms as they desired, and rent was not paid in cash. At harvest time payments to Bill Barnes, manager of the Rancho, were paid in real crops he had selected from each sharecropper. The sleepy, backward region now became a giant conglomerate headed by one of California's most powerful entrepreneurs. Sharecroppers were ordered to stop their dairying activities and restrict their efforts to planting and harvesting oats and hay. This action forced the Portuguese dairy men out of the valley. Acre after acre of the Rancho was planted in walnuts, pears, peaches, sugar beets, pumpkins, navy beans, tomatoes, and corn. Moraga became the largest Bartlett pear producer in the United States. Train loads of pears, walnuts, vegetables were shipped all over the United States from the train station across from the BARN. The operations of the Rancho were moved from Burton Valley to the Moraga Ranch, and 100 to 150 workers were employed during harvest time while 12 to 45 workers were needed the rest of the year.

Some of the land was marked for real estate activities through the sale of property to developers by the Moraga Company. These were 1-to-5-acre parcels, and 500 acres was set aside for a town to be known as MORAGA. When the Oakland-Antioch Railroad was completed in 1913, Irvine began to implement his first real estate venture. The central portion of the town consisted of 21 blocks which were to form a series of concentrical hexagons. Cutting through the development was the Bryant-Moraga Highway-Munster Street, now Country Club Drive, grandly decorated with a series of immense concrete urns down the center. In the middle of the subdivision, steps led up to a rose garden atop a mound meant to be a park. The project failed, and of the 200 lots, only one lot was sold, and five cottages built. A town center began in 1914, the Moraga Barn, Willow Spring School and train station, and in 1920 a grocery store, Moraga Grocery. In 1914 a country club and golf course were planned, shares were sold, but World War I and Prohibition forced the failure of this project. A Lafayette subdivision between First and Third Streets was successful. Valle Vista became a reality in 1914 with home sites that sold for $500 each. Twenty of the proposed 57 homes were built. But in 1923 the homes were bought up by the East Bay Water Company to build the San Leandro Reservoir.

Hooper had sold land to John Carr for his son Alfred Carr and his son-in-law Frank G. Sanders. Irvine never acquired this land. In 1927 Irvine donated land to St. Mary's College in hopes this would promote development. It did not! A new Master Plan was created but the stock market crash of 1929 and the ensuing Depression put a stop to this elaborate plan. In 1936, when times were improving, lrvine sold 180 acres to develop Moraga Estates at Orinda's Crossroads. In 1937 Donald Rheem bought the property then owned by Gertrude Mallett and Alberta Higgins. His big push to develop the area came in 1944 when he purchased an additional 906 acres and later another 530 acres from the Moraga Company. From 1945-1947 Irvine resumed his campaign to sell off lots for development. The development was from Orinda Crossroads toward Moraga along Moraga Way. After WWII, Senator Breed and Bill Barnes pushed to have the United Nations in the Burton Valley Area. However, John D. Rockefeller gave land in New York.

James Irvine died in 1947.

Donald Rheem's purchase of rancho lands saw the END of the monolithic ownership that had been the situation since Joaquin Moraga and Juan Bernal. There was now the Moraga Company and Rheem operating in the area, each dividing property among more individual owners.

Thus began the creation of a viable community where for almost 130 years only few had lived and worked.

Moraga Historical Society
P. O. Box 103

Membership Application

Please print & fill in the information below:

Name(s): *
No. & Street:
City: *Apt.:*
State & ZIP: &
Phone: ( ) —
Cell 1: ( ) —
Cell 2: ( ) —
Email 1:
Email 2:

*** Enter as for name tags** *Date Today:*

Membership	Amount	Enclosed
Single:	$15.00	$
Family or Business:	$25.00	$
Donation:	Optional	$
Total:	Deductible	$

Please make checks payable to and mail to:

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