The Moraga Historical Society

2025 FIRST QUARTER MORAGA MEMORIES-YESTERDAY, TODAY, TOMORROW

The Fight for Open Space in Moraga

By Susan Sperry

James Irvine, once the sole owner of much of the Rancho Laguna de Los Palos Colorados (future Moraga), died in 1947 and control of the rancho was transferred to the Utah Construction Company. From 1950 until 1957, Moraga was just a rural stop on the railway line from Oakland to Sacramento. The first of four "Moraga Area" General Plans was written prior to incorporation by the Contra Costa County Planning Department in 1955. Moraga was still relatively isolated and undeveloped. By 1963, Moraga had four major access roads (St. Mary's, Canyon, Moraga Roads, and Moraga Way) and the Rheem Shopping Center, built by Donald Rheem.

As early as 1965, Contra Costa Supervisor James Moriarity suggested the county adopt a "green belt" ordinance to preserve open spaces which the Board of Supervisors approved November 1965. The Ford Foundation in 1969 financed a study "People for Open Space". In early 1970 the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) developed an Open Space plan to preserve open space in the Bay Area, feeling it essential to preserve the open feeling of the bay area and protect natural resources. The state legislature in 1971 passed legislation requiring each county in California to develop an open space element in its general plan.

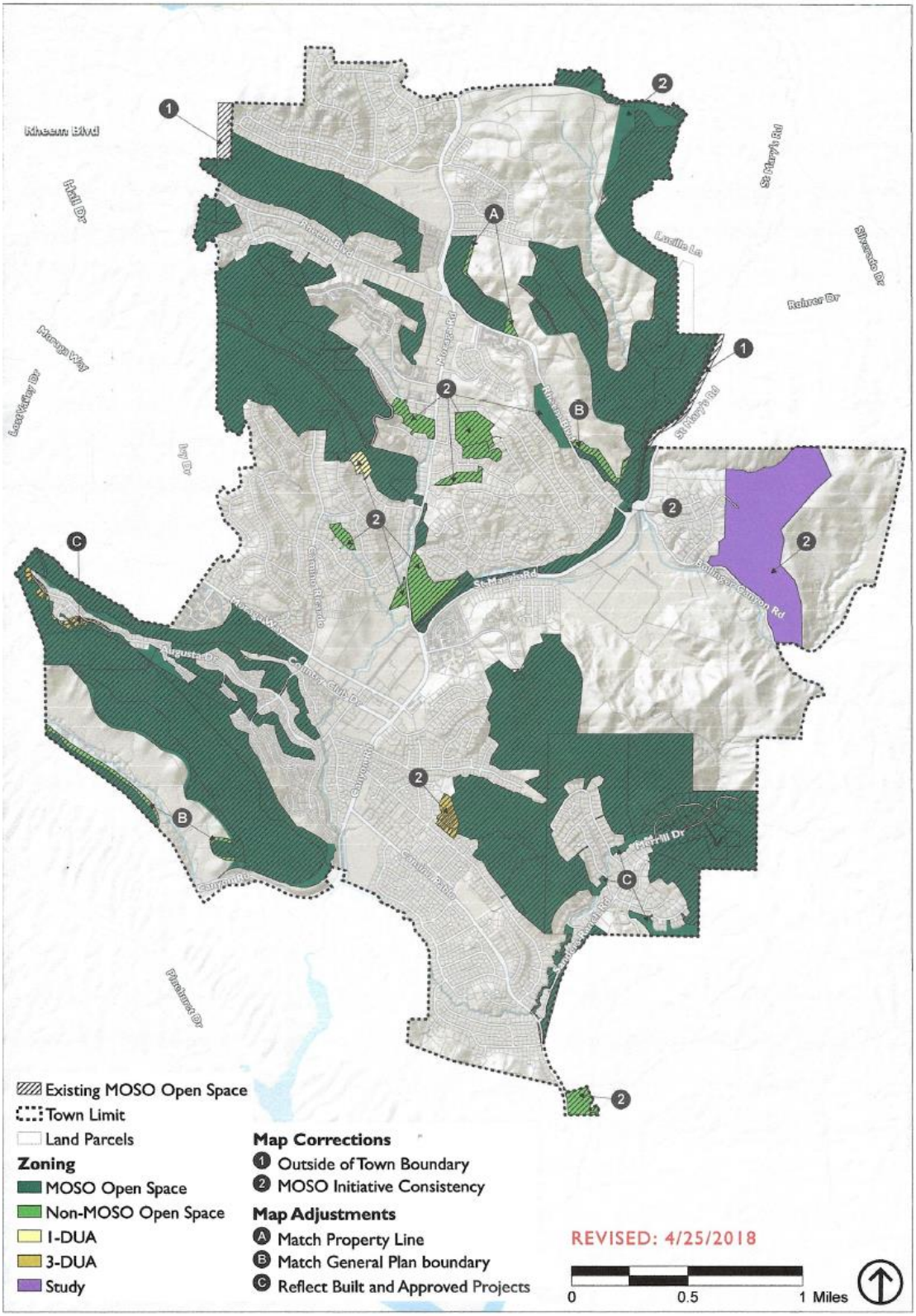
In 1970 Harold Smith, builder of much of Moraga, showed concern for the lack of interest in the community in taking action to ensure that the ridges be left unscathed by bulldozers and left for large estate type parcels with hiking and riding trails. Smith stressed that Moraga is at a crossroads. Residents must take some interest in what is happening to their open space. If the remaining sharp, steep areas are not developed into larger parcels with recreational area, trails, and open space, contractors will develop Moraga with typical tract type homes.

Residents did act, and, in 1974, the city of the Town of Moraga was incorporated, the 15th city in the county and the only one to achieve cityhood in the state that year! The new city of the "Town of Moraga" included only 9.53 square miles of the old Moraga planning area. Local control over future land development, "home rule" and an enhanced community identity were major reasons for the successful effort. The need for comprehensive, long-range planning for managed growth subsequently led to the General Plan formation program with maximum citizen participation through data-gathering committees, Town Hall meetings and public hearings. A five-year moratorium was placed on development until 1979, when the General Plan was adopted.

Many Moragans pleaded for years with Town government to take action to control development and felt outside developers were pressuring the Council to let them build poorly conceived tracts on fragile, unstable, slide-prone lands. With the threat of a large subdivision in the Rheem Valley area and loopholes in the existing General Plan, the Rheem Valley Homeowners Association requested that the Town Council authorize the Planning Commission to undertake a study of the General Plan, specifically as it pertained to ridge and hillside open space, asserting that density in those areas needed to be revised downward and that density transfer and cluster development appear to be inappropriate for those open space areas. The Town Council directed the Planning Commission to do so on October 16, 1985. On November 8, 1985, a response was received from the Open Space Committee of the Planning Commission reporting their observations. The Town Council then authorized a building moratorium excluding the large subdivision causing the concern of the Rheem Valley Homeowners Association. In response, the concerned residents, in arms about a potential subdivision formed "Moragans to Save Open Space" and authored and sponsored MOSO (Moraga Open Space Ordinance) to be

placed on the April 8 ballot. MOSO served to do three significant things for future development in Moraga: 1) Prohibit development on minor ridgelines, defined as ridges 800 ft. in elevation; 2) Prohibit development on hazardous areas that are geo-technically unstable, and 3) Prohibit building on slopes of 20% or greater. On April 8, 1986 the ordinance passed with 51% of Moraga voters approving.

TOWN OF MORAGA MOSO OPEN SPACE ZONING MAP



Lawsuits filed by two developers against the Town claiming MOSO unconstitutional, inconsistent with the Town's General Plan and a violation of the state housing statutes were rejected by the Contra Costa County Superior Court in December 1987. This decision has become a landmark decision in California case law.

In 1998, after two years of lively debate, the Town council clarified and eliminated inconsistencies between MOSO and the Town's General Plan and zoning ordinances, particularly concerning the development of recreational facilities on open space lands.

In reaction to seven large subdivisions being proposed before the Planning Commission in 2008, concern again fomented regarding the strength of MOSO. As a result, two initiatives were placed on the November 2008 ballot to protect Moraga's open space. The electorate voted on two different views of open space land use which could have a lasting impact of future development in Moraga. Eight months of discussion and debate over the merits of each initiative ended in neither initiative receiving enough votes to change MOSO.

On April 11, 2018, the Moraga Town Council unanimously voted to update and strengthen its open space development regulations, which began in 2013 when first proposed. For five years, the Town gathered community input through a series of public meetings, workshops, study sessions, and focus groups. This input overwhelmingly favored stronger protection of open space, ridgelines, scenic views and hillsides. The Town Council adopted a set of revisions to the General Plan, Municipal Code, MOSO Guidelines, and Design Guidelines that clarify and strengthen the rules governing development on steep slopes, grading of "high risk" areas, viewshed protection and ridgeline protection.

The history regarding preservation of open space reflects the ongoing concern among residents of Moraga to protect the semi-rural nature of our town on the one hand and the reasonable entitlement of landowners to develop their property on the other hand. With each new development proposal challenge, the MOSO Pandora's Box opens anew. In most recent discussions on this issue, thoughtful debate and compromise has led to reasonable conclusions. Visit the Town of Moraga's **Planning Documents** page to retrieve a MOSO pdf.

Exploring Moraga's Trails: Nature, History, and Adventure

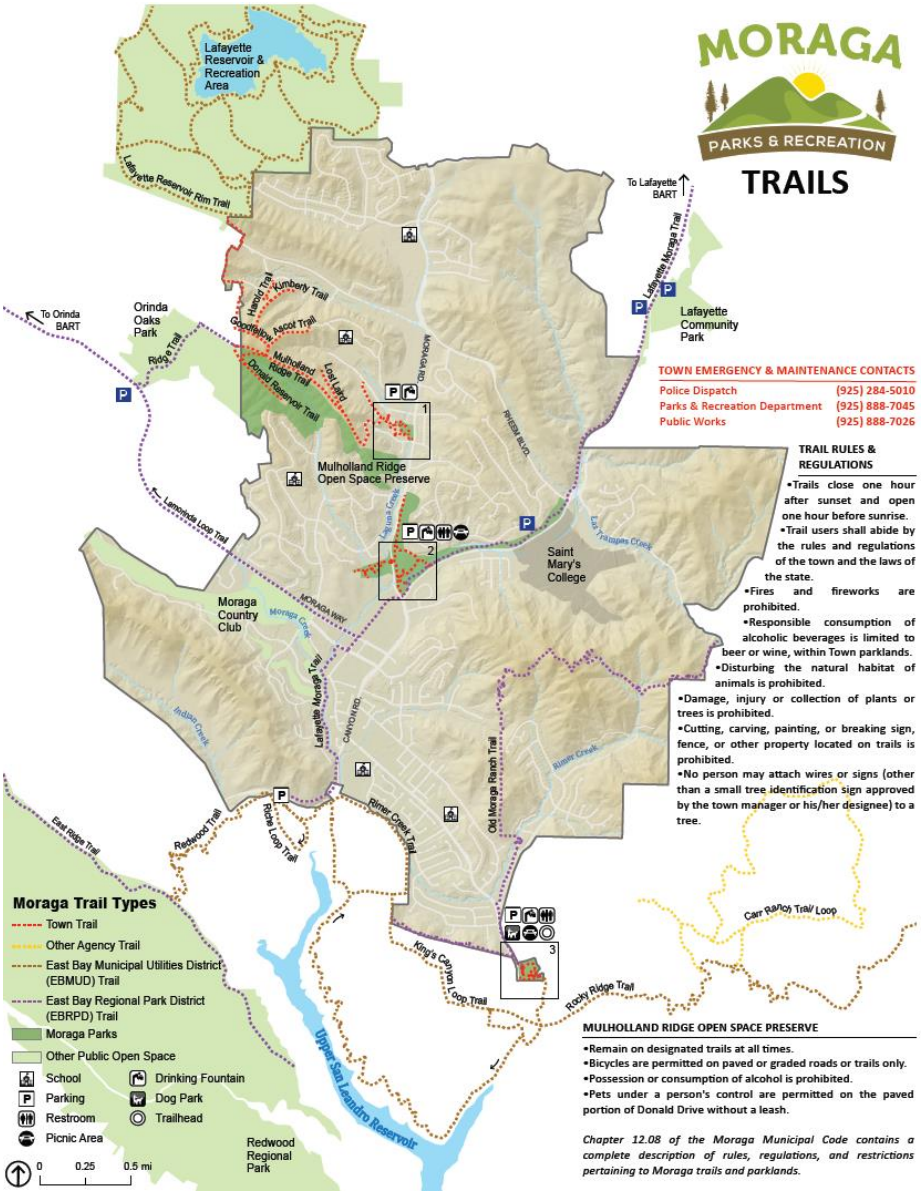
By Susan Skilton and John Kaiser

Moraga offers a diverse network of trails that showcase the area's natural beauty, from rolling hills to serene forests. These trails provide opportunities for walking, hiking, biking, and more, while immersing visitors and residents in the sights and sounds of local wildlife, geology, and foliage. The Town of Moraga has available online a **Moraga Trails Map** which features 19 trails administered by Moraga and Lafayette, East Bay Regional Parks and EBMUD.

But this is only the beginning. Organizations such as the **John Muir Land Trust** work to acquire former ranches such as Painted Rock to preserve as open spaces. Imagine a future 50 mile "Walking Moraga Challenge" that spans this network and which has nodes that allow one with the help of a smartphone to see the present transformed into the past with the help of our digitized photo archives. Imagine this including segments such as our **Old Town Site Walking Tour** and many more to come. During the July 4th and Pear Festival celebrations our MHS booth representatives were amazed by the number of people whose desire for a sense of place included knowing and seeing Moraga's past.

Here is a glimpse of the possibilities.

Short and Easy Trails: For those looking for a gentle walk in nature, trails like Mulholland Ridge and the Riche Loop at Valle Vista are perfect options. These easy paths provide a quick escape into the outdoors and are ideal for families or casual walkers. **Multi-Use Trails:** The Lafayette-Moraga Trail, a result of the Rails to Trails project and a thwarted freeway proposal, offers a longer route connecting Moraga and Lafayette. This mostly paved trail is popular for biking, skateboarding, and walking. Convenient parking is available at Moraga Commons and smaller lots along St. Mary's Road. **Challenging Trails:** For hikers seeking a more strenuous experience, trails like the King Canyon Loop from Valle Vista and the Carr Ranch and Rocky Ridge trails from Rancho Laguna Park offer hills, sweeping views, and encounters with grazing cows. Additionally, the Rim Trail at the Lafayette Reservoir features a 5-mile circuit with a notorious steep incline, "Cardiac Hill," that challenges even experienced hikers. Walkers can choose to descend to the paved reservoir loop or stay on the fire trails. **Historical Highlights:** Valle Vista, once a suburb of Moraga before being acquired by water companies through eminent domain, now serves as a staging area for hikes into the EBMUD watershed and Redwood Regional Park. Along the way, hikers can pass notable landmarks, including the historic Jack Allen farm located to the right of the trail that leads to the Redwood ascent.



Moraga buries a time capsule on its 50th anniversary of incorporation -- November 12, 2024

By Vera Kochan

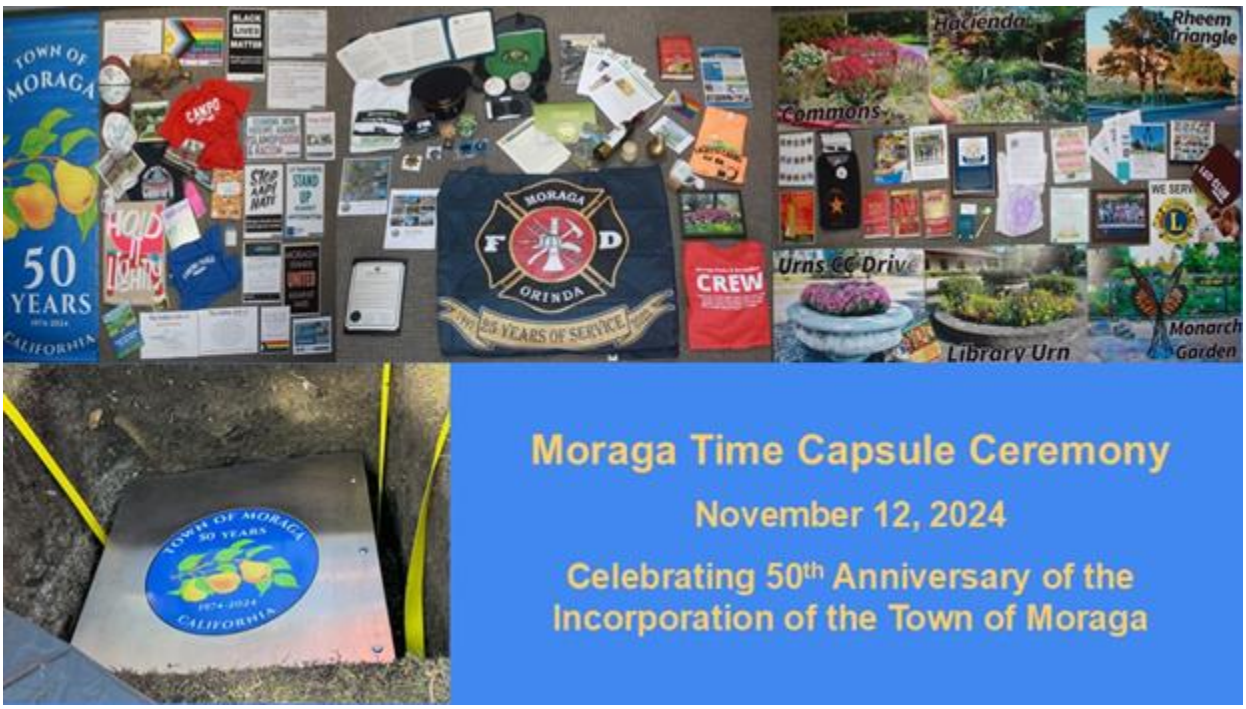
The Town of Moraga pulled out all of the stops in order to commemorate and celebrate its 50th anniversary of incorporation during 2024. One of the highlights was the burial of a time capsule loaded with items of importance to the community.

We officially became a town on November 12, 1974, and a small handful of citizens formed an Ad Hoc Committee dedicated to bringing awareness to the rest of the residents that 50 years had gone by since that day, and it needed to be acknowledged. The first meeting was held in August 2023, and consisted of then Mayor Renata Sos, Vice Mayor Teresa Onoda, residents Susan Sperry, Holly Hartz, Ana Moon, and myself, in addition to Town Manager Scott Mitnick, and Parks and Recreation Director Mackenzie Brady.

As we went around the table suggesting things we could do, Moon mentioned a cookbook; Hartz wanted a parade (which Onoda worked on with her); Brady felt banners hanging at strategic intersections and official T-shirts bearing a 50th anniversary logo would be fitting; Sperry would decorate the library's display case with 1974-related items and orchestrate the Historical Society's quarterly newsletters to inform members of events that led to the Town's incorporation; and I wanted to have a time capsule -- something that would have historical impact both now and 50 years into the future. As Moraga Historical Society President, and 80-year resident, Sperry confirmed this time capsule would be the Town's first.

In June 2023, before the Ad Hoc Committee was formed, the Town Council approved a $25,000 initial budget appropriation to serve as "seed money" for the year-long 50th anniversary celebration. The time capsule itself cost approximately $3,000. I chose one made of stainless steel that would stand the test of time and could be reused by future generations with a minor amount of buffing. Its dimensions are 48" long x 40" wide and 16" deep. I did some research beforehand by contacting two other cities who had purchased from the company we chose (Heritage Time Capsules). The Smithsonian Institute also had high praise for their products.

There were 35 separate contributions to the time capsule with over 126 individual items placed. Empty, the stainless steel capsule weighed 103 lbs., and full it's most likely close to 170 lbs. Our capsule was nearly filled to the brim.



The time capsule project would not have been as successful as it was without the items contributed by the following individuals and organizations: 2024's Mayor Teresa Onoda, Vice Mayor Steve Woehleke, Council Members Renata Sos, Kerry Hillis, and David Shapiro, Town Manager Scott Mitnick, Assembly Member Rebecca Bauer-Kahan, 50th Anniversary Ad Hoc Committee, Moraga Police Department, Moraga-Orinda Fire District, Moraga Public Works Department, Moraga Planning Department, Moraga Parks and Recreation Department, Moraga Library, Moraga Historical Society, East Bay Regional Park District, Art in Public Spaces, Moraga Park Foundation, Moraga Education Foundation, Be the Star You Are!, Moraga Garden Club, Kiwanis Club of Moraga Valley, Moraga Community Foundation, Moraga Junior Women's Club, Moraga Citizens Network, Rotary Club of Moraga, Moraga Lions Club, iKind, The Saklan School, Camino Pablo Elementary School, Los Perales Elementary School, Donald L. Rheem Elementary School, Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School, Campolindo High School, and Saint Mary's College.

While there is no real monetary value to the objects that went into the capsule, there is great sentimental value. As I drove around town making contribution pick-ups for six months, I was humbled by what each person or organization was putting into the capsule. Many of the items were a result of board or club member meetings, and I could feel the pride when those items were entrusted to me. In every case, I sensed that the givers were hoping that it was good enough for such an important inclusion. The variety and creativity of the items placed into the time capsule was beyond what I had hoped for.

In order to prevent decay to any items placed in the capsule, a Preservation Kit containing desiccant packets, acid-free envelopes and clear bags was ordered. No staples, paperclips or other rusting metals were included. No food items or liquids were allowed, and the public works crew lined the burial hole with gravel for drainage in addition to placing a visqueen tarp over the top of the capsule just prior to filling the hole with dirt. The time capsule itself has a rubber seal lining the edges of the lid.

During the burial ceremony, which took place in front of the Council Chambers, we were honored to have speeches by two of Moraga's original council members who were elected into office in 1974: former Mayors Sue (McNulty) Rainey and Barry Gross. Additional short speeches by the entire Town Council, Town Manager, and Cherise Khaund (field representative for Rebecca Bauer-Kahan) were made before hard hats and golden shovels were passed out in order to begin burial of the capsule.

The party-like atmosphere was well-attended by town staff and folks who had the time to drop by for the 2pm event on a beautiful sunny day. Town Bakery catered the hot appetizers, desserts, and beverages while balloons danced merrily in the breeze. Posters of all the capsule items graced the area so that attendees could see what others had contributed.

A few weeks later, Diamond K of Lafayette donated the rock that would mark the spot of burial. A plaque was attached to the rock with verbiage that was written as a gentle reminder of when the capsule should be dug up and reopened: "On this day, November 12, 2024, the Town of Moraga celebrated its 50th Anniversary of Incorporation by burying a time capsule beneath this rock. We entrust the opening of this time capsule to the Moraga of tomorrow, and know that 50 years from now, when the Town celebrates its 100th Anniversary in 2074, Moraga's pride will still be strong." It was purposely buried under the lawn in front of the Council Chambers so that anyone attending town meetings would always spot the plaque and perform a mental countdown of its opening.

As with any monumental endeavor, there are those that played a supporting role in making the ceremony itself come off without a hitch. Special thanks to Susan Sperry, Moraga Public Works Director/Town Engineer Shawn Knapp and his staff, Jeanet Lara, Kyle Salvin, Jose Limon, Ruben Ochoa, Manny Rivera, and Raul Serrano. Also, thanks to Julie Stagg and MHS Board Member/Digital Assets Coordinator John Kaiser for filming the entire **Time Capsule Ceremony** and making it available for viewing on the MHS website: Moragahistory.org (click on the Moraga History heading and go to: **Moraga 50th Anniversary** where you can also view the September 28 Moraga Parade video created by Bill Kelley). Photos of time capsule contents are also included on the website.

MORAGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
PRESENTS

A TRIP BACK IN TIME TO 1974, WHEN MORAGA BECAME INCORPORATED AND A TOWN COUNCIL WAS FORMED. WE ARE HONORED TO PRESENT FORMER MAYORS SUE (MCNULTY) RAINEY AND BARRY GROSS, WHO WILL DISCUSS WHAT DROVE THE PUSH FOR INCORPORATION: THE HIGHWAY 77 CONTROVERSY, THE FORMATION OF LAMORINDA BOUNDARIES, OPEN SPACE, THE "MARTINEZ MENTALITY", AND MORE.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2025

CASITA AT HACIENDA DE LAS FLORES

2100 DONALD DRIVE, MORAGA

1-3 PM

RSVP TO SUSAN SPERRY AT RANCHSUSAN@AOL.COM

BY FEBRUARY 15TH

MORAGA HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEMBERS FREE, GUESTS $5

REFRESHMENTS

RESERVATIONS ONLY

NO CHILDREN UNDER 12

LIMITED SEATING

WHEN YOU RSVP BY EMAIL PLEASE INCLUDE ANY TOPICAL QUESTION YOU WOULD LIKE US TO CONSIDER AS PART OF THIS EVENT

Archive Digitization Plans for 2025

The Moraga Historical Society made pivotal progress in 2024 creating the framework for digitizing our physical archives stored at our History Center and to present the digitized items on our web site **MoragaHistory.org**. We have already scanned our Slide Collection and are now working on our Photo Collection which holds over 1,000 photo prints.

We scan photos and documents with our Epson scanner. Photos are saved as high resolution tiff files for long term archiving and as jpg images for online posting. Maps, which tend to be too large for a scanner bed, are photographed and saved as pdf files. Documents from our "Vertical Files" are scanned and saved as pdf files.

The images are presented online in a catalog format with a thumbnail image similar to a stamp catalog. A decision was made to "scan now" and "curate later" so do not worry about some of the low quality or duplicate images. Our priority is to scan as quickly as possible and enlist community help later with curating the photos and adding brief explanations.

To help people search our online items we have classified them according to "time period", "general subject" and "location type", each of whose categories have their own catalog that you can access through our **Resources Index**.

During 2024 the MHS board made a decision to make available online high resolution jpg images of our photos under the Fair Use principle which you can load by clicking the thumbnail image in the catalog.

We have also started converting our audio and video collection into MP4 files we post to our **MoragaHistory YouTube** channel and make available through the Voices of the Past section of our web site. An example is the **1989 Fire Dept History Talk by Fire Chief Ed Lucas**.

In December we launched a **What's New Update** for months when we do not publish the quarterly newsletter. It is available online and will also be emailed as a pdf. Its goal is to update our digitization progress and remind everybody about upcoming events.

John Kaiser, Digital Assets Coordinator

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The final event celebrating the 50th Anniversary of Moraga's incorporation took place on Tuesday, November 12, 2024, with the burial of a time capsule, the inspiration spearheaded and orchestrated by Moraga Historical Society Board Member Vera Kochan! Check out her article in this issue and visit our **Time Capsule** web page to view photos of the items placed in the capsule. Furthermore, the MHS speaker series will continue this thread with surviving first Council Members Sue (McNulty) Rainey and Barry Gross telling their personal stories leading up to incorporation in 1974. This is a not-to-be missed event so make your reservations early!

One of the goals of the new 1974 Town Council was to gain control of Moraga's development future and eliminate Martinez's influence. Paramount in this process was balancing development and open space. These concerns reached a climax in 1986 when the Moraga Open Space Ordinance (MOSO) was voted into law, an issue not fully resolved until 2018. The summary included in this newsletter is meant to give an overview of the history of open space in Moraga.

Included in this mailing is the annual membership envelope. Single memberships are $20, household $30. Place your check in the envelope and remember to include your street address, phone number, and email contact for future communication. The offer of a free copy of Moraga's Pride will continue for NEW members only.

Susan Sperry, President

Moraga Historical Society
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