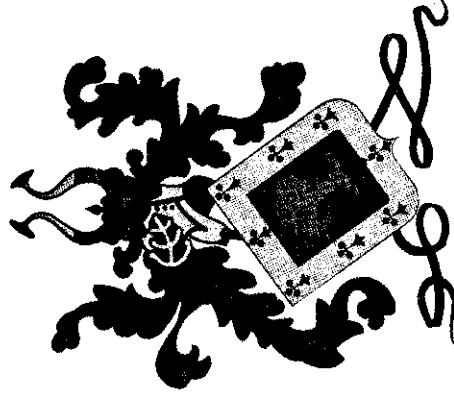


RANCHO MORAGA

Historical Notes by the
Moraga Historical Society



Coat of Arms of the Moraga Family

RANCHO MORAGA

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In 1835, fifteen years before California's admission to the Union, the Mexican government granted to Joaquin Moraga and his cousin, Juan Bernal, some 13,000 acres (3 leagues) of land. Joaquin Moraga, following family tradition, had served in the Mexican army. His father, Gabriel Moraga, won renown as an explorer and Indian fighter and is credited with naming the San Joaquin, Sacramento, Calaveras, Merced and many other major Northern California rivers during his explorations. Joaquin's grandfather, Jose Joaquin Moraga, was the lieutenant of Anza's California expedition of 1775 and the founder of San Francisco, the Presidio and Mission.

Land Grant to Joaquin Moraga

The original land grant included portions of present day Orinda, Lafayette and Redwood Canyon, as well as the communities now known as Rheem and Moraga. It was called Rancho Laguna de los Palos Colorados, "ranch of the lake of the redwoods," for the small lake and the redwood grove within its boundaries.

Boundaries

Redwoods from the Moraga Canyon grove and others provided lumber for buildings throughout the Bay Area and supplied some of the timbers for the building of Mission San Jose. A saw mill was erected in 1852 and redwood lumbering became an important economic activity until the late 1850's when the redwoods were depleted. (The present trees in the Canyon groves are all second growth.) It was through lumbering that Moraga's road systems were born.

Redwoods and Lumbering

Within the boundaries of the Rancho Moraga was a shallow tule lake, created by the run-off from the hills. Moraga's Campolindo High School is built on the site of this lake bed.

The Lake

Indians

Early inhabitants of the area were Indians of the Acalanes tribe, whose main villages were in Lafayette. Indian relics, such as mortars, pestles and arrow heads have been found in local creeks and streams. An early visitor to the Moraga Rancho, James Lamson, wrote of Indians in attendance at the Moraga home and ranch in the 1850's.

The Adobe

An adobe house was built by Joaquin Moraga about 1841. It was the hub of the Rancho, the home of the Moraga family until about 1886. After many years of disuse, the house was purchased and restored in 1941 by the late Mrs. James Irvine. The adobe still stands on its original foundation, atop a hillside about 3½ miles southeast of the Orinda crossroads, above Moraga Way. The site offers a sweeping view of the valley, with Mt. Diablo visible in the distance. At present the house and the surrounding 27 acres of land are privately owned. In 1954 the Contra Costa Historical Society affixed a bronze plaque to the outer wall of the adobe, designating it as a California Historical Landmark. (No. 509).

Moragas Lose Property

In 1850, when California became a part of the United States, the Moraga's claim had to be approved by the United States Government. Title to the land was confirmed in 1855; however, the survey of the lands was not completed until 1876. Thus, while the Moragas were in possession of the Rancho, they were continually involved in litigation to confirm and protect their title. They were also involved in numerous disputes with squatters, some leading to violence. The 1870's saw bitter feuds erupt into bloodshed as the pioneer Moragas sought to defend their home against claimants. By 1886 the entire property was lost to the Moraga family. (However, some of the descendants of the Moraga family still

live within the boundaries of the original rancho). Some of the property was sold to pay taxes, and a large portion was claimed by Moraga's former attorney, Horace W. Carpenter, in exchange for services. A small portion of the property was divided into ranches, some of which were later subdivided into residential areas.

Early Subdivisions

Attempts to subdivide and develop the larger area of almost 12,000 acres began in the 1890's when railroad builders Angus A. Grant and James A. Williamson formed the Moraga Land Association and the Moraga Railroad Company, planning to encourage settlement by linking Moraga to Oakland by rail. When the venture failed the land reverted to Mr. Carpenter. Other early developers in the area formed the Hooper Land Company and the Moraga Company. A subdivision was planned in central Moraga in 1913. The attempt failed, but an interesting landmark remains—the large stone urns on Munster Drive which was to be the center of the town.

The Urns

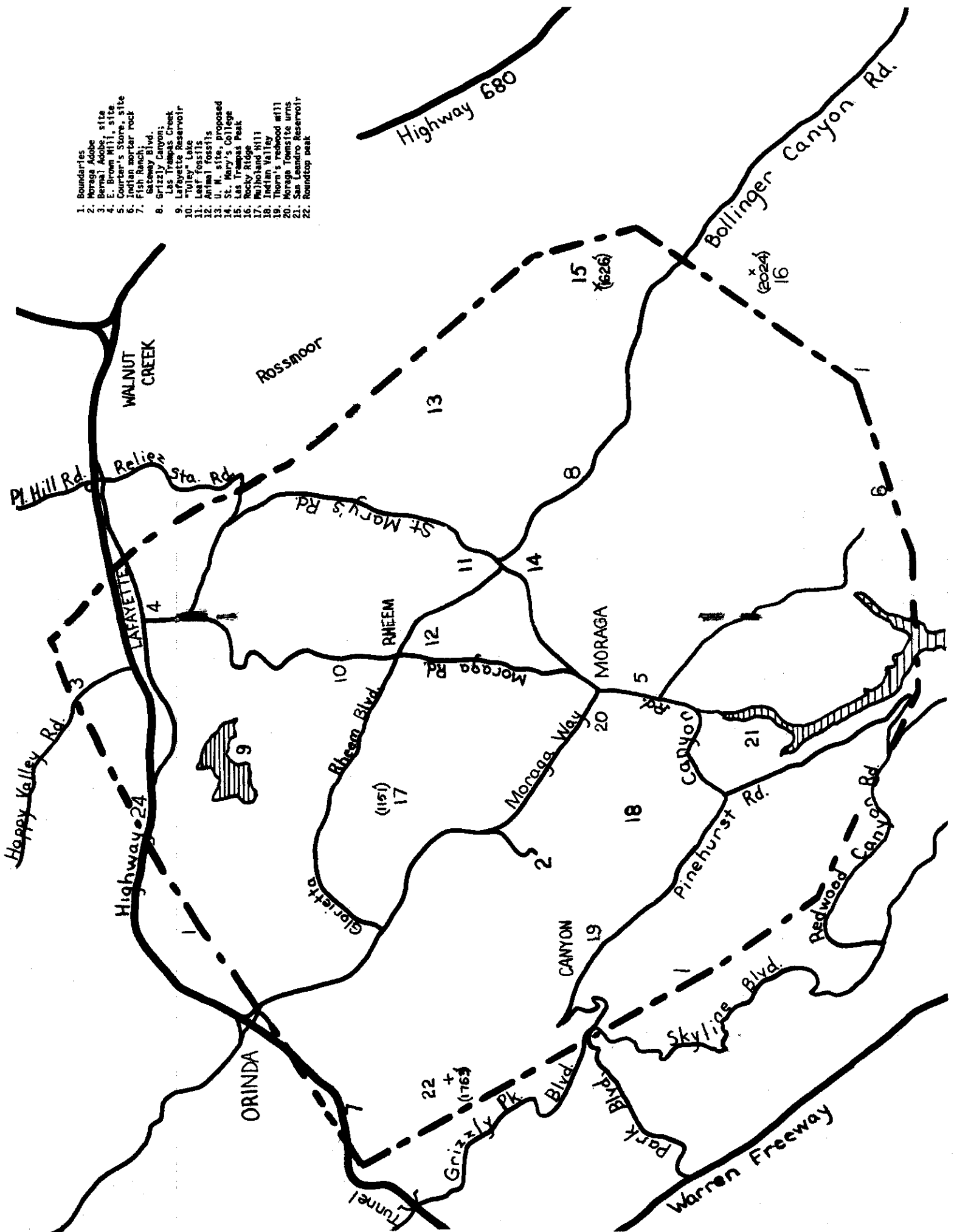
The Oakland and Antioch Railroad, which began operation in 1911, also induced attempts at subdivisions. By 1913 service was extended through Canyon and the Moraga Valley. The line boasted 271 miles of track, "the most scenic railway on the coast," extending from San Francisco to Chico. It was later purchased by the Sacramento Northern Railroad Company, and offered passenger service until 1941. Freight service was continued until 1957.

Railroads

At its peak of operations, the railroad brought thousands of weekend visitors to the Canyon recreation area, Pinehurst and Madrone, which featured open air dance halls and picnic grounds. Several subdivisions were formed; one named Valle Vista was within the boundaries of the Rancho, about

Canyon

1. Boundaries
2. Moraga Adobe
3. Bernal Adobe site
4. E. Brown Hill site
5. Courter's Stone site
6. Indian mortar rock
7. Fish Ranch
8. Gateway Blvd.
9. Grizzly Canyon
10. Las Trampas Creek
11. Lafayette Reservoir
12. "Wolf" Lake
13. Last Forest
14. Antelope Falls
15. U. N. site, proposed
16. St. Mary's College
17. Las Trampas Peak
18. Rocky Ridge
19. McJannet Hill
20. Indian Valley
21. Horn's redwood mill
22. Moraga Tombsite urns
23. San Leandro Reservoir
24. Roundtop Peak



one-half mile from present day central Moraga. Foundations of several residences still remain. Most of the property has been purchased by the East Bay Municipal Utility District.

Canyon School

In 1917 a one room school house was built in the community of Canyon and is still in use today, maintained as a separate school district.

Hangman's Tree

Near the school stands a tree which, according to local legend, was the site of the hanging of cattle thieves. Imbedded in "hangman's tree" is an iron ring which was once used by patrons of the local saloons as a hitching ring.

The history of the various public service institutions reflects the modest pace of growth which has characterized the area until recently. Postal service in the early days of the Rancho was by means of a rawhide sack nailed to a black walnut tree, the mail being delivered by anybody who happened to ride by. Mail was next distributed from John Courter's General Store, the first frame building in Moraga, which was constructed in 1854. Both the tree and the store were later destroyed by fire. The first government post office was established in 1886 with Henry Bird as postmaster. The post office was housed in local stores and an old railroad depot until Moraga received its first post office building in 1955. A second and larger post office building was completed in November, 1966.

Moraga Post Office

The Moraga Fire Department began solely as a volunteer service, with local residents participating when the need arose. The single fire engine at the disposal of the volunteers was kept in a centrally located shed. In 1950 one of the Moraga Ranch buildings was donated for use by the fire department when the Moraga Fire District was formed. Presently Moraga is served by two fire stations,

Moraga Fire Department

one in Rheem, built in 1957, the other on Moraga Way, built in May, 1968. The department now employs twenty firemen who engage in various emergency services as well as fire prevention and fire control.

Moraga was the site chosen for the first dial telephone service in California in 1927, when there were 40 subscribers to the service. Prior to that date a nine number telephone switchboard was housed in a general store called Moraga Mercantile, which name was later changed to Moraga Barn. The Barn, built about 1911, is one of the oldest buildings in Moraga.

Moraga Barn

St. Mary's College moved to the Valley in 1928 when presented with 100 acres by the Irvine and Breed Moraga Company. It had been founded in 1863 in San Francisco, but moved to 30th and Broadway in Oakland in 1889. Its site is that of the former Moraga Country Club House (and sub-division). It is under the direction of the Christian Brothers. During the Second World War, St. Mary's College was chosen as one of the four sites in the nation for a Pre-Flight School, and shared its facilities with the Navy. Founded as a men's college with emphasis on Liberal Arts, plans are being made to include coeducational instruction.

St. Mary's College

The cliffs along Bollinger Canyon Road to the north of St. Mary's College reveal the footprints of mammoths which roamed this area in past geologic ages. The Rancho area is known for its fossils. The general Rancho area was a series of lakes and lagoons fed by a large river that flowed from a mountain range, the crest of which is now the Farallon Islands. The cliffs were once the bottom of a lake bed. Many plants and animal fossils—sea shells, bones and teeth of extinct animals such as mastadons, three-toed horses and camels have been found in the Moraga area.

Fossils

Moraga and the U.N.

Moraga was once considered as a possible site for the permanent United Nations headquarters. A report presented to the U.N. Committee by San Francisco's Mayor Lapham emphasized Moraga's desirability from various aspects, its mild seasons, the beauty of its hills and native trees, the pastoral views offered by a semi-agricultural community with its orchards and ranches.

Recent Growth Spurt

Moraga remained primarily a ranching and farming community until 1953. In the last 15 years Moraga has experienced a sudden growth spurt marked by the appearance of many new housing developments. The Rheem California Land Company and Utah Construction and Mining Company have played major roles in the development of housing and commercial facilities.

Present Day Moraga

Today Moraga is still a semi-agricultural community, its residential areas featuring spacious homesites, modern schools, libraries and convenient shopping centers. The present population of Moraga is nearly 10,000 people.

Moraga Historical Society

The Moraga Historical Society was founded in October, 1965, by a group of local residents for the purpose of discovering, preserving and disseminating historical information concerning the Rancho Moraga. The Society has over 200 members and holds regular meetings featuring programs and speakers on subjects of local historical interest. Membership information may be obtained by writing to the Moraga Historical Society, P.O. Box 103, Moraga, California 94556. (Application, page 11.)

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

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