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The Joaquin Moraga Adobe: A Local Historic Treasure

By Andrea A. Firth

The original Moraga Adobe structure circa 1935, before its restoration and expansion in 1941
Photo courtesy of Orinda Historical Society



The Moraga Adobe after its restoration and expansion in 1941
Photo courtesy of Orinda Historical Society



Moraga Adobe



Exterior view of the Moraga Adobe, October 2008 Photo Kent Long



Exterior view of the Moraga Adobe, January 2009 Photo Teresa Long

If Joaquin Moraga's influence was measured by the presence of his name around Lamorinda, one could not deny that Joaquin, an early settler of the ranch lands that now comprise parts of Moraga and Orinda, had a significant impact on the area. Moraga's name graces a town, a valley, two main arteries-Moraga Way and Moraga Road, a school district, a middle school, a library and a hardware store, to name just a few. Yet, the most historically significant application of Moraga's name may be on a small ranch-style home set on knoll above Del Rey Elementary School-the Joaquin Moraga Adobe.

Following receipt of a land grant in 1841, Joaquin Moraga built the three-room home which still sits on its perch in Orinda overlooking its neighbor Moraga to the south. "It's the oldest adobe in the entire East Bay area. It may even be the oldest residence," states Kent Long, archivist for the Orinda Historical Society. Growing up in the El Toyonal neighborhood of Orinda, Long knew of the adobe's existence but had never seen the property. He recently had the opportunity to view the adobe inside and out as part of a group of locals invited to tour the residence by the new owner of the 20-acre parcel of land on which the (approximately) 165-year old home is located.

Although the empty residence is in some disrepair, Long found that the building's condition was better than what he had expected. The Moraga Adobe was renovated and expanded in 1941, at which time bedrooms and a veranda were added and the adobe walls were covered. The original three rooms of the adobe retain a Spanish feel with white walls and a large-tile floor, but the newer rooms, with linoleum and shag carpet, show evidence of decorating choices in the 1970's that are inconsistent with the home's heritage. Presently, the windows of the adobe have been boarded up to deter would-be party-goers.

The Moraga Adobe has been designated as a Historical Landmark by the City of Orinda and the State of California and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, which makes it an absolute must-see to local preservationists like Orinda resident Bobbie Landers. "The communities of Orinda and Moraga are both interested in the preservation of the Moraga Adobe," states Landers, who is enthusiastic about the prospect of the adobe being accessible to the larger community. Landers recently held the first meeting of the newly established Friends of the Joaquin Moraga Adobe in the living room of her home. Both the Mayors of Moraga, Dave Trotter (a history buff and adobe expert in his own right) and Orinda, Sue Severson, were in attendance along with several members of the Orinda Historical Society and other interested residents. "The adobe is an important historical landmark in the Bay Area dating back to the pre-gold rush days before California established statehood," explains Landers. "It would allow people to be acquainted with very early California," she adds. The next meeting of the Friends of the Joaquin Moraga Adobe will be held on Monday, March 9th at 7:30 p.m. Those interested to attend should contact Landers at 254-8260.

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