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## Moraga Historical Society Celebrates 60 Years of Preservation

By Sophie Braccini



Members celebrate the Moraga Historical Society anniversary at the Aug. 5 Fandango.

Photo Carole Lucas

were informed that if they wanted one, they would have to start it. Postmaster Elinor Dickenson joined them, as well as Brother Dennis. Other residents joined the first board, alongside two Orinda residents, Jean and Donald Manuel, then owners of the original Moraga Adobe property where they were raising their family.

"One day Sonia Levitin knocked on my door and asked me if she could see the 1841 original house of Joaquin Moraga," remembers Jean Manuel, who now lives in Missouri.

"From there on we were associated with the society. My husband was the first president; I'm still a member today." She plans to come for the MHS celebratory luncheon planned in October.

Manuel remembers MHS picnics and meetings on the property grounds. At the time she was also inviting in school children and Scout troops to visit the abode and explore the ranch. That educational tradition continues today as each year the society welcomes Moraga School District third-graders to the history center, bringing history to life, showing the students artifacts and telling them compelling stories.

In the MHS's early days, Dickenson, who knew a lot of the old timers, mostly farmers and cattle ranchers, conducted research. Brother Dennis continued his research locally and beyond, such as looking up and interviewing families of the town's founders who had moved away. Sonia Levitin wrote the first historical booklet about Moraga. Many residents gave books, microfilm, videos, public records, maps and artifacts that are now preserved in the Historical Society archives. Among the first to join were also the parents of the current society president Susan Sperry. "Our family moved to the area in 1944," says the former Moraga schoolteacher.

At the beginning, everything was stored at the college, with very limited access. It wasn't until 1999, after a successful fundraising campaign, that the MHS was able to build an addition to the existing Moraga library to house the collection and to serve as a history center that's open to the public three days a week.

Elsie Mastick and Margaret De Priester are the two archivists at the history center. "I come twice a week to open the center and clip articles that have a relationship with Moraga or one of its

The Moraga Historical Society (MHS) launched its 60th year anniversary celebration with a wild Fandango Aug. 5 at the Hacienda de las Flores. The 170-member group is celebrating years of collecting, archiving, conserving and sharing information about those who went before us, since the Saklan Indians, and about those who made the Town of Moraga what it is today.

Moraga's history conservancy started even before a historical society was founded in the fall of 1965. In the attic of the Saint Mary's College library, Brother V. Dennis Goodman, the SMC librarian since 1953, began accumulating documents and books pertaining to the history of the Moraga family and the Rancho Laguna del Palos Colorados, the Mexican land grant that gave to Joaquin Moraga and Juan Bernal the land that is now Moraga and parts of Orinda and Lafayette. Then in 1965, newcomers Sonia and Lloyd Levitin, who were looking for a historical society to join,

prominent institutions or residents," explains Mastick. Everything is referenced in books where all the subjects are listed alphabetically. Each subject corresponds to a file that's stored in one of the cabinet drawers that fill one of the society's rooms. There are biographical files and topical files about garden club presidents, Moraga family heirlooms and photography, the Transpacific Railroad, the Moraga Barn, and hundreds more. There are also audio and video documents, maps, and public records stored at the history center, as well as geological information and facts about early Californians and Saklan Indians.

Former MHS president, Moraga mayor and citizen of the year DePriester says she gets a lot of satisfaction from working at the Historical Society and helping people who come in with questions. "I like to keep things straight," explains DePriester. "People come to us with questions about their family who was in Moraga a long time ago, or about the elementary school they attended." The society also holds many of the Hacienda de las Flores archives. An architect from Gould Evans, the firm in charge of creating a new plan for the historical building, recently came to do some research.

Over the years, the MHS has developed other ways to disseminate history. The book "Moraga Pride" tells the history of the Rancho and the town; postcards with Moraga historical places are sold; and in the late '90s a large throw representing historical landmarks was produced. "I saw such a piece at the Orinda Historical Society," remembers Carole Lucas who started the project. "We assembled a small committee with Sarah Cory, chose the pictures, got the authorizations and got the first one weaved." The 100 percent cotton, 49-by-65-inch throw can be ordered online at <http://www.moragahistory.org>.

The society also offers its members conferences on historical topics and organizes trips to historical sites. An anniversary banquet is planned for Oct. 10, featuring architectural historian and guest speaker Laura Ackley, who published a book about the 1915 Panama Pacific international exhibition. "The speech will be an introduction to the field trip we will take to the San Francisco Historical Society later in the year, for the celebration of the exhibition's 100th anniversary," explains Sperry. Interested residents will be able to join in.

Friends of Joaquin Moraga Adobe Fandango

A Fantastic Fandango will be presented this year by the Friends of the Joaquin Moraga Adobe at Wilder's Quarry House. This annual event, to raise monies to rehabilitate the 1841 Joaquin Moraga Adobe, will be held at 6 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 29, featuring KGO's On-The-Go John Hamilton as master of ceremonies as well as food, music and dance. Tickets may be purchased online at [moragaadobe.org](http://moragaadobe.org), at the Orinda Chamber of Commerce, 26 Orinda Way, or at Moraga's Hacienda de la Flores.



Bill Lund and Elsie Mastick Photos Carole Lucas



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