



Lafayette, California

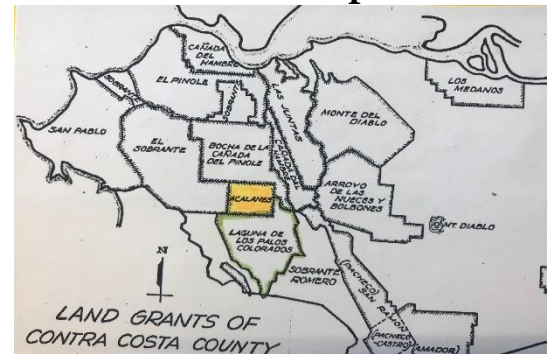
October 2020

Vol. 47, No. 4

Located on the Lower Level of the Lafayette Library

THE "HOODS" OF LAFAYETTE.....HAPPY VALLEY

Happy Valley is central to Lafayette history as it was the site of the first European resident in what would become our town. Candelario Valencia, a former Mexican soldier in their war for independence, began living there in 1828 and was granted the Rancho Acalanes by the Mexican government on August 1, 1834. He and his family lived in an adobe in what is now Happy Valley. Late in the 1830's, it was burned down by the Native Saclan, and he and his family moved to San Francisco, leaving vaqueros who lived in a "shanty" to manage the cattle he ran on this land.



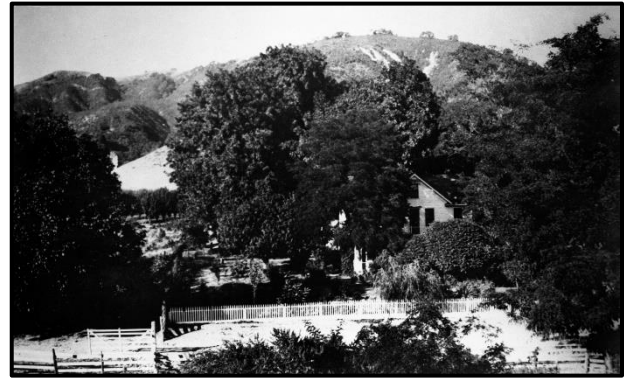
In the 1840's, the widow of Juan Bernal and her children lived in an adobe about a mile up modern Happy Valley Road. Juan Bernal and Joaquin Moraga (cousins) were granted another land grant, Laguna de los Palos Colorados, in 1835. One of the most difficult things about land ownership for 50 years or more was establishing boundaries. Many grants contained wording like, "far to the north between the arroyos San Pablo and Galindo". Or a group of buckeye trees on a hill would mark a boundary. Needless to say, boundaries were not clear, which is why the widow Bernal ended up on the Acalanes land grant and not her own.

When Elam and Margaret Brown bought the Rancho Acalanes in 1848, they first settled in what is now Happy Valley. It was February, so they built a rough home quickly for shelter. In 1849, they built a horse powered grist mill. They realized, after giving it a couple of years, that there was not enough water to sustain them in Happy Valley, and they moved to the present day downtown. A marker on a rock marks the spot of the Brown's first home on Happy Valley Road, past the school, near a black metal fence.

Remember the widow Bernal and her children living in an adobe she thought was on her land grant? Elam Brown protested her being on his land because the big issue was boundaries. It went to court in Martinez, and finally in 1858 the boundaries of Rancho

Acalanes were determined. The widow Bernal had to move. The adobe stood until it was severely damaged in the 1906 earthquake.

The first farm in Happy Valley was Locust Farm owned by Nathaniel Jones (aged 26) and his wife Elizabeth Allen Jones (Margaret's daughter). They had crossed the country in the wagon train Elam Brown led. They followed him to Santa Clara and to the Canyon redwoods, and then to the Rancho Acalanes. He purchased 372 acres for \$100. He planted Black Locust trees which can live for 200 years. Some of them can still be seen. Nathaniel Jones became the first sheriff of Contra Costa County, and later, a public administrator and a supervisor. The farm was bounded by what is now Crestmont Drive and Redwood Lane, on both sides of Happy Valley Road. The house was at 3786 Happy Valley Road.



Happy Valley was agrarian, as were most all places in that time period. Hay and oats to feed animals, and fruit trees were the main crops, although most people also had gardens and a milk cow or two. Cattle was still important, especially as much land was too hilly to farm. By the early 1900's, Happy Valley Road was established and there were a series of gates so that cattle could be driven down to what is now Mt. Diablo Boulevard. Gates across the road were so that people's cattle and horses didn't get out, but could graze across the road. Gates had to be opened and closed to proceed down Happy Valley Road. Cars began to make an appearance in the early teens, and were more common by the 20's. School kids were let out of class to see them when they first arrived. Trucks made the trip over the hills to Oakland much easier. No one seems to know where the name Happy Valley came from. There is one place where early on it was called Pleasant Valley, and then soon after, Happy Valley.



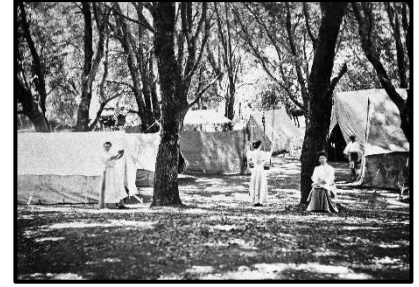
On Cosso Court, just past the school, there is a barn which is still there. In the early 1900's, it was the site of many dances. The admission money was used to help build the Town Hall (1914). The ladies of the community would serve midnight suppers of ham, turkey, potato salad, cakes and pies. Dances remained one of the main entertainments in Lafayette until the car took over, and people found more options.

Water was a problem in Happy Valley, as Elam Brown had discovered. The Cossos, who bought 55 acres in 1920, tried to grow vegetables as they had in Alameda, but found they were not very successful. Consequently, they grew only spinach and cabbage in the winter, and tomatoes and squash in the summer. They also had an orchard growing pears, peaches, and walnuts. They took their produce to Oakland through the old tunnel- a 12 hour round trip. The old tunnel was narrow and higher in the hills from the current Caldecott Tunnel. In 1924, they bought a truck which made things a bit easier.

Across from Happy Valley School is a house that has stood there since 1900. It was recently remodeled, and while larger, the original house can still be seen in the front. It was built by the Herbert and Estella Brown Mullikin family. Estella was related to Elam Brown. Another old house on Happy Valley Road is the McNeil house built in 1880.

The family owned the Pioneer Store that is now the Sideboard Restaurant, the oldest building left in Lafayette (the 1850's). The redwood tree on the front side and a pear tree closer to the street were planted when the house was built. The pear tree still bears a single pear most years. Amazing.

The first non-agrarian use in Happy Valley was as a vacation destination! In the early 1900's, people would come to camp-out to escape the fog on the bay side of the hills. This picture is of the John Eckelston family of Oakland in 1908. Next, small vacation homes began to appear, and some people even had summer ranches for the family to enjoy, tended by caretakers. The Peardale land



was an example. Francis Malley of Oakland purchased 200 acres in 1910. His caretakers grew pears, peaches and had a vineyard. With the opening of the Caldecott tunnel in 1937, commuting became possible and many summer cottages were remodeled for year 'round living. Over the next two decades, Happy Valley transitioned from agrarian to suburban.

Soon, the Lafayette Historical Society Room on Golden Gate Way, next to the Friends Book Shop, will be open again. We have lots of pictures, and lots of stories. We love to answer questions. E-mail us until we are open. Stay safe.

~Laura Torkelson

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE 2020

Welcome to our new members and to those who have recently renewed their membership or have made a donation:

Michelle Fanto-Chan
Andrew Parrott
Patricia Whitten
Diane Barbera
Mark Harrington
Diane Sasser

Peter Callahan
Patricia Howard
Dick & Lisa Cohen
Kathy Merchant
Caren Armstrong
Mary Lou Till

Sheila Rogstad
Meredith Meade
Richard Silbert
Christine Raymond
Molly Gleason
Joan Bruzzone

Thank you for your support of the Lafayette Historical Society.

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Oral Histories which date from the 1970's have been stored on tapes and discs in the History Room. Many of these tapes have recently been digitized and are available for viewing on the Historical Society Website – lafayettehistory.org. In the top row on the website you will find Archives/Oral Histories which will take you to the oral histories. Below is a list of the tapes that tell about early life in Happy Valley. The committee continues to work to make additional tapes available.

Rita Santos: Mrs. Rita Santos moved to Happy Valley in 1903, the daughter of Antonio Borges who had come from the Azores. The Borges family took their produce and meats

to markets in Berkeley and Oakland by wagon through the Kennedy Tunnel which was located above today's Caldecott Tunnel. Rita married Manuel Santos and in 1918 he purchased 12 acres in Happy Valley (4052 Happy Valley Road) next door to the Borges property. (See the story of Rita Borges Santos below)

The Cosso Family (Lou and Jack Cosso): The Cosso family bought 55 acres in Happy Valley in 1920. Jack Cosso's uncle came from Italy and helped keep the farm going after Jack's father died, later marrying Jack's mother. They grew vegetables using dry farming techniques due to a lack of water. They took their produce to Oakland through the old tunnel, a 12 hour round trip. In 1924 they bought a truck which made the trip faster. The Cosso barn still stands on property next to Happy Valley School. The barn was the site of dances held in the early 1900s to raise money to build Town Hall.

Marianne Malley Millette: The Malley family owned a summer home in Happy Valley called Peardale. Francis Malley, Marianne's grandfather, purchased the land as a ranch in 1910. The ranch had pears, peaches, walnuts, and a grape vineyard. It was east of Upper Happy Valley Road, south of Lower Happy Valley Road, and north of Los Arabis Drive. In 1932 when she was two years old, she moved here with her family from Oakland. Marianne tells about growing up in Lafayette when it was a small, mostly farming community where everyone knew each other by name. Francis and Agnes Malley later subdivided the area of their ranch, which became known as Peardale (today the area of North and South Peardale Roads.)

RITA BORGES SANTOS

Rita Borges was born in Berkeley in 1900 and died at the age of 92 in Lafayette. Her father came to this country from the Azores and her mother was from the Maderia Islands. The family moved to Happy Valley in 1903 on the advice of Mr. Borges' doctor; Rita's father had typhoid fever and was told to get away from the Bay Area climate.

Farming was the way of life in the early 1900s. The wagon trip was long and through the Kennedy Tunnel (above today's Caldecott Tunnel). "My father when he was going through the tunnel with the horse and buggy, would take the hard end of the whip and guide himself on the left side through the tunnel. When he couldn't touch the wall, he knew he was too far over so he would pull the other way a little bit. If he was too close, he was afraid the hub of the wheels would catch on the timbers of the sides of the tunnel and he would pull out a little bit. The horse would kind of find the way but couldn't be expected to think about the hub of the wheels."

At times Borges would hang a lantern under the wagon so that if anybody was coming, they could see him. Once in a while the horses would stop and my father would say, "Oh, someone is coming." Then he would whistle and the other people would whistle. Then they would get out of their buggies and see how much room they had to pass one another. It was very close. The tunnel was the scene of several robberies. A man names Johnson was killed in the tunnel by some robbers.

At the age of six, Rita Borges met Charles Malley in Oakland at their first communion. Their families became life-long friends. When the Malleys moved full-time to 1216 Upper Happy Valley Road in 1932, they got their milk from the Santos' cow every evening, according to Marianne Malley Millette. Marianne and her sister, Patricia, recall visiting as children-not to play house-but office.

Rita rode her horse to Lafayette Grammar School. In those days Happy Valley Road

crossed several ranches. All the gates had to be opened and closed. Lafayette Grammar School was located on Moraga Road, today the site the the Lafayette United Methodist Church. Her horse spent the day in a stall at the barn next to the school. All grades were taught in one room by one teacher. There were 32 children at the time. The first grade was at the front with each succeeding grade progressing to the 8th at the back by the window. One grade was taught at a time.

Rita's husband, Manuel Santos, came here from Brazil. They met at her cousin's home in Oakland when she was 16 and he was 20. They were married five years later. In 1918, Manuel purchased 12 acres in Happy Valley next to the Borges' Ranch. The address was 4052 Happy Valley Road. Later the ranches were combined to total 40 acres.

Rita and Manuel never had children. They were survived by members of Manuel's family and a circle of admiring friends and neighbors. Rita's intelligence helped them to retire "well off." She and Manuel started with farming the land but ended up owning at least one shopping center. In later years, Manuel Santos was quick to offer a glass of homemade wine to an afternoon visitor. Rita and Manuel Santos were the kind of people you were lucky to have known.

~excerpted from an article by Ann Yeager Goll

OIL IN HAPPY VALLEY

It bubbled up from the ground. Edward and Anne Flood came from near Dublin, Ireland with his mother and eight children. They bought a farm in Happy Valley in 1889. Edward loved to take visitors to a section of his farm where oil seeped to the surface. He would light a match, and *poof* - quite a show. Once he got too close and singed his beard and eyelashes! The oil was said to be so pure that it could be used to light lamps.



In the early 1900's, one of the Flood relatives thought that perhaps money could be made from the oil. He got investors, issued shares, drilled an oil well and made extensive plans for more. Unfortunately, no money was made on the one well. As a child, Genevieve Gallagher, born to the Flood family in 1918, remembers getting a pair of shoes with "oil money". No fortune, and the venture was abandoned. (The Flood name might be familiar because their decedent, Nancy Flood, taught at Springhill for many years.)



The oil was in the Los Arabis Drive area. That street, Timothy Drive, Rahara Drive, and Natasha Drive are all named for the Arabian horses that Dr. Leo Musser owned in the 1930s and 1940s. He reported that when it rained a lot, oily water covered his basement floor. Any Happy Valley residents still see oil? Let the Historical Society know. Come in and learn more amazing facts about Happy Valley.

~Laura Torkelson



Lafayette Historical Society
PO Box 133, Lafayette Ca
94549

925-283-1848

www.lafayettehistory.org

LHS

Board of Directors
2020

Larry Blodgett

Nancy Flood

Sharon Jones Fraetis

Lauren Herpich

Sande Hubbs

John Kennett

Mary McCosker

Laura Torkelson

George Wasson

Return Service Requested

Thank you to the Dana Green Team for sponsoring this issue of the LHS Newsletter.



**DANA
GREEN
TEAM**

#9 in the USA - That's our 2020 ranking on REAL Trends The Thousand list of top real estate professionals in the category of transaction volume among medium size teams.

We love our role in sharing this incredible community with Buyers and Sellers, and helping you with your real estate needs!

**Lafayette's #1 Real Estate Team
Since 2008**

925.339.1918 | DanaGreenTeam.com
DRE 01482454

COMPASS