



Located on the Lower Level of the Lafayette Library

IN MEMORY

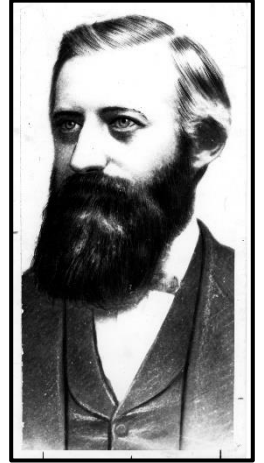


The Lafayette Historical Society and the City of Lafayette have recently lost a long-time volunteer, supporter and friend with the death of Marechal Duncan at 98 years young. Marechal was a member of the Board of the Lafayette Historical Society since the 1990s, serving as President, Vice President, and as part of the Oral History Project. His dedication, support and expertise were invaluable to the organization. His enthusiasm, charm and sense of humor will be remembered. Besides his membership on the LHS Board, Marechal was a founding member of the Lafayette Community Foundation where he headed the Senior Liaison Committee. He co-chaired Lafayette's Sesquicentennial Celebration, served on a blue- ribbon Open Space Task Force, chaired an event to celebrate Lafayette's role as a Pony Express way station, was a Boy Scout leader for 20 years, and a baseball coach. He was active in Walnut Creek's SIRS (Sons in Retirement). He was also chosen as Lafayette's Citizen of the Year in 2015.....he will be greatly missed. He is survived by his wife Doris, two sons and a daughter, and seven grandchildren.

THE "HOODS OF LAFAYETTE": BURTON VALLEY

The part of Lafayette now known as Burton Valley has a totally different history from the other neighborhoods. First, it was not part of the Acalanes Rancho that Elam Brown bought. Burton Valley, part of Orinda and nearly all of Moraga, were part of Laguna De Los Palos Colorados granted to Joaquin Moraga and his cousin Juan Bernal in 1841. (The "Laguna" was a small lake where Campolindo High School is now.) The influx of Americans who wanted land after the gold rush was a death knell for the Mexican land owners. People squatted on land they felt should be free land. When the Mexican American War ended in 1848, part of the treaty stated that Mexican land owners could

keep their land. By the early 1850's squatters convinced Congress that the Mexicans should not just keep their land on the basis of the past, they should have to prove that the land was theirs! The land owners incurred huge debts trying to prove their claims. Attorney fees, grant surveys, court costs, lodging, transportation to hearings, translators (as most did not speak English) were beyond the means of this land rich and cash poor group. Unsophisticated ranchers did not really understand the concept of mortgaging property. They didn't understand that if the loans failed, they lost the land. Opportunistic lenders slapped astronomical interest rates onto the loans, thereby helping to ensure that they gained the land. Enter Horace Carpentier, a New York opportunist.



The Moraga and Bernal heirs spent most of their lives trying to prove their claim to their land. When they succeeded in 1875, it was a hollow victory, because they could not pay off their debts. In 1885, they lost the land. There to snap it up was Horace Carpentier. He had already managed by hook or crook to take over the Peralta land and begin the town of Oakland. Making sure that he had the rights to the port, he became very wealthy. Here is a quote from the Oakland Daily Transcript, October 7, 1877:

"If the early settlers ... had taken Horace W. Carpentier to a convenient tree and hung him, as they frequently threatened to do, the act would have been inestimably beneficial to immediate posterity."

Being interested in money, Carpentier ran the land acquisition as a business. He booted off all squatters, and only allowed tenant farmers. He built a beautiful house near where Burton Valley School is now, for his overseer, J.B. Watson. Next, from 1886 to 1925,



Arthur Burton lived there with his family as the overseer for Carpentier and then for the Moraga Land Association. The land around him became known as the Burton Ranch, then as Burton Valley, even though he never owned it. Carpentier sold the still intact large tract of land in 1891 to the Moraga Land Association. They too, were a business. They decided they could make more money with sharecroppers, so all tenant farmers were now told what cash

crops they had to produce such as dairy, oats, fruit orchards, or hay. Such a large proportion of the crop was taken that the farmers barely made ends meet.

Robert Wing was born in 1930, and while not raised in Lafayette, his mother was and his grandparents still lived here. She was an Oliveira who was born and raised near Glenside Drive. The family moved to what is now Lafayette Orchard on Mt. Diablo Boulevard and grew crops there where they could own land and make their own decisions. (From the LHS Oral History Project):

"Where my grandparents farmed – Burton Valley – it was just hay fields – no trees. And then later the Moraga Land Company put in trees. My grandfather wanted to buy that property, but they wouldn't sell it."

Bob Wing's mother told him a bit about growing up in Burton Valley:

"There was a little house just before you cross the bridge at Glenside on the south – that's where Mom was born. That's where they farmed. Ma used to tell stories about a dog they had that would pump the water. There was this wheel on the pump and the dog would get in the wheel and watch the trough. When the trough filled up the dog would quit. Filling the trough for animals."

In the early 1950's, the Moraga Land Association sold its land to the Utah Construction Company. A small amount of the original land had been sold by then, but the vast majority was still owned by one owner. The Utah Construction Company was the fourth owner. They were the ones who sold the land, and housing developments began to appear over the course of the 1950's. This is when Burton Valley changed from an agricultural area to a suburban community.

~~Laura Torkelson

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE 2021

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

Marianne Monagle	Jay Lifson	Kelly Daggs
Forrest Shyrock	Carey Starn	Marrino Berbano
Katie Peacock	Amy Anderson	Adrienne Rogers
Sarah Blumenfeld	Richard Whitmore/Jacinta Pister	Betsy Willcuts
Todd & Betty LaPorte	Paul Joseph & Melissa Chen	Caren Armstrong
	Peter Frazier	

Thank you for your support of the Lafayette Historical Society.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES

Your membership is exceedingly important as it makes it possible for our organization to pay annual rent to the City of Lafayette for our space and be able to pay for our phone, insurance, and other needed supplies. If you have a **red dot** on your address label for this issue, your membership is up for renewal in the next month or two. Even though the History Room has been closed since March, we still have bills to pay!!

Student Membership is \$10

Individual Membership is \$25

Family Membership is \$50

Additional Donations are always appreciated

Please send to LHS

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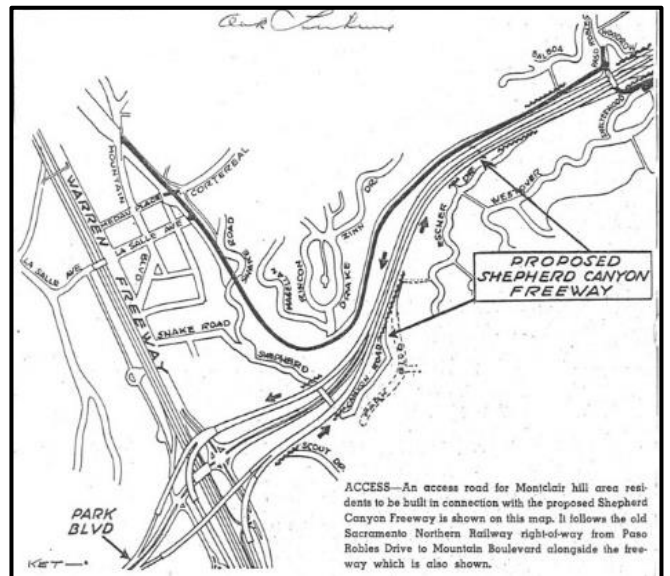
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

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 Burton Valley. The committee continues to work to make additional tapes available.

Sophie & Robert Wing: Sophie and Robert Wing, who brought together two old Lafayette families when they married in 1961, were both born in 1930. Sophie was the youngest of eight children in the Machado family that ran the Alta Crest Dairy in Lafayette. She describes the dairy operations, and in particular, the roles assigned to her from a very young age. Bob Wing also grew up on the pear and apple farm which was run by his grandparents, the Oliveiras, as he worked from a young age selling fruit from a stand on the main street. Sophie and Bob describe life in Lafayette during the years before, during, and after the completion of Highway 24, and during World War II.

OH HOW CLOSE WE CAME...

Today's Burton Valley has the ideal combination of nature and comfortable living. Not noisy, full of traffic, short on nature or full of high rises. It could have been that way if a few planned projects had come to fruition. As written in the *Contra Costa Employee*, March 1955, "In the future, some say 1957, construction will no doubt begin on the Shepherd Canyon, a highway designed to relieve some of the load on the Tunnel Road, Sign Route 24."



The Shepard Canyon Freeway, Highway 77, was planned in the 1950's to begin at Pleasant Hill Road and Highway 24, go through Burton Valley, Moraga and Canyon to Oakland, roughly following the train route (part of which is today's Lafayette-Moraga Trail). Land was bought by CALTRANS, but the freeway was never built. It was still on the drawing board twenty years later. In one of the first grassroots protests, 1970s community activists said, "No to Highway 77". One of the first Environmental Impact reports in the state was conducted. The continuing plans for the freeway were stopped. What a different place we would live in with a freeway down the middle of Burton Valley!

What if the United Nations had built their headquarters in Burton Valley instead of New York? Can you imagine the supporting infrastructure that would be needed when delegates and reporters from all over the world came to town? After World War II, the

Moraga Land Association decided to put its energy into selling land for others to develop. They came up with an ambitious plan suggesting to officials of the UN that they should

come look at Burton Valley in their search for a permanent headquarters. Officials did come on an inspection tour and voiced considerable enthusiasm for the idea. One unidentified member of the team said, *"If the United Nations headquarters should become permanent in such a peaceful setting, surely most controversial world affairs could not help but be settled peacefully."* The Moraga Land Association was almost successful, but then John D. Rockefeller gave \$8,500,000 to acquire 6 blocks in midtown Manhattan, and Burton Valley was forgotten.

Two other close calls for Burton Valley were averted. When BART was first approved in the 70's, the route it was to follow was the old Sacramento Northern railroad route – today the Lafayette-Moraga Trail. Can you visualize BART and BART stations along that route? We would have BART in our neighborhoods. The Lafayette Improvement Association (active since 1911) was determined to have BART built down the freeway, and not in neighborhoods. Fortunately, they prevailed.

The Lafayette Improvement Association stepped in again when a large shopping center was planned on St. Mary's Road between the fire station and the Community Center. They insisted that business should be kept downtown, and not in residential areas.

What a different place Burton Valley would have been!

~~Laura Torkelson

THE SACRAMENTO NORTHERN RAILROAD IN BURTON VALLEY

The Oakland, Antioch and Eastern Railroad (O,A&E) was created in 1913 to carry freight and passengers from Sacramento to the East Bay. In 1920 it was sold to the San Francisco-Sacramento Railroad Company. In the early days, the trains were single cars, and there were special observation cars on express trains. The electric railroad, with a 600-volt system, began service through Lafayette in 1913. Although it looked lonely going through Lafayette, it was actually quite scenic, especially when climbing the hills to the train tunnel in the Oakland hills. Passengers commuting to San Francisco went through the train tunnel, over the Key System in Oakland, and transferred to a ferry for the city. At first, Lafayette and Burton were the only two local stops on the route. Burton Station, with its long sidetrack, is pictured on the last day of passenger service in 1941.



The West Lafayette Station was at the end of School Street. In the early days of service a special 3:00 am train waited to take home Town Hall partiers who had come from Walnut Creek or Oakland to dance the night away. Special trains were also in service to take picnickers to Redwood Canyon during the summer months, on weekends, and on holidays. At harvest time, there were extra trains to take crops to the Produce Mart in Oakland. Over the years, the Lafayette stops were Burton, Glenside, West Lafayette, and Raliez (Reliez).



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LHS

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Return Service Requested

Thank you to Norma and Bob Evans for their sponsorship of this issue of the LHS Newsletter.

They asked that we feature the logos of two local organizations that they support.



LAFAYETTE
CHAMBER

