

LAMORINDA Seniors

Still Ranching at 95 Years Old

Submitted by Joan Frazell Marable



Gordon Frazell purchased Moraga land in 1944

Photo provided

Gordon Frazell was born in the family home on Oct. 13, 1913 in the little town of San Felipe in a fertile valley near Hollister. A descendant of a Gold Rush family, he was reared on the family dairy farm and cheese factory which was a principal industry in San Benito County. In 1935 Frazell moved to Oakland with highschool sweetheart Ynez Coulter, where they married and soon

started their family in Alameda. He worked as a steamfitter leader man in the Alameda shipyards during World War II. He is a World War II Honoree on the Home Front and is listed in the new World War II monument in Washington D.C. Frazell combined both ranching and a contracting business until his retirement in 1978 when he turned his full attention to ranching.

In 1944 Frazell bought an 80 acre ranch, which is over 150 years old, in the hills just south-east of Saint Mary's College. He remembers that in 1944 there was very little in the town. At the Moraga Barn ranchers gathered and dusted off after a days work. If ranchers wanted to communicate with each other, they left notes on the bulletin board for the itinerate ferrier or vet, "Need the horse shoer next week," "looking for a good stead," etc. Of course there was the school and the Northern Pacific Railroad Station which housed the U.S. Post Office consisting of 25 family post boxes. There were very few scattered houses. There was also the walnut huller and the Moraga Ranch Land Company whose red buildings still stand, one of which housed the only fire engine.

When Frazell began ranching off Bollinger Canyon Rd., just south of the peaceful Lake La Salle alongside of St. Mary's College, there were only two other families on the dirt and gravel road which crossed Las Trampas Creek. They had to drive over a small, narrow, wooden bridge which frequently washed out in stormy weather. The road had no name, so Ynez Frazell named it "Valley Hill Drive" as it was the driveway to the three families who lived there: George Greenwood family, John Sanders family and Gordon Frazell family. It was Greenwood and Frazell who first improved and paved Valley Hill Drive. Sanders had the valley planted in oats and wheat while his cattle roamed the hills. Frazell cleared off brush and trees on his place in order to plant oats which grew to the height of the horse's stomach.

Frazell says that in 1952 Moraga began to change dramatically and lose its rural character. The Utah Land Company began building housing developments which flooded the flat lands around the town center. Rheem developed with the first Safeway store in the area at one end of the mall and the theater at the other end. Rheem Blvd. was constructed over the hills to connect St. Mary's Rd. to Moraga Rd. and traffic increased dramatically.

In 1952 Frazell designed and built his family home on his ranch. He continued in the building trades for Lincoln Construction Company which also developed new homes at the Moraga/Orinda border and on the flat lands of Pleasant Hill Rd. and Olympic Blvd. Later, Frazell developed his own construction company until he retired when he put his full attention to ranching his grass fed Black Angus herd. On the ranch he has always been assisted by his two daughters, Susan and Joan, who began working with their father at seven years of age.

In addition to his construction business and ranching, Gordon found time to help build a new home for his parents in Lake County, his sister in Mendocino County and two homes on the ranch for his daughter's families, the Johnson-Sperry home and the Marable home in 2005 when he was 90 years old.

When asked how he does all of this and how he stays so youthful looking at his age, he replies that he is an active "can do" man and that he likes to work and keep busy. This keeping busy includes a creative streak. He often invents and makes many of the parts and machines for use on the ranch. He has been honored by The Farm Journal magazine for some of his inventions.

Frazell will celebrate his 95th birthday with five generations of his family on his ranch, El Rancho Ynez, at the family's favorite old picnic area by his 150 year old barn.

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Young Gordon Frazell walking his ranch

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