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Published August 28th, 2013

## Valley of it All

By Cathy Dausman

Burton Valley almost wasn't a Lafayette neighborhood. It originally belonged to Moraga, said Laura Torkelson of the Lafayette Historical Society. The land was a portion of the grant belonging to Joaquin Moraga known as Rancho de Laguna de los Palos Colorados.

Burton Valley Road names today still reflect that with streets which include Los Palos Drive, Los Palos Circle and Via Los Colorados. In the mid-1800s, a land speculator and swindler known as Carpentier outmaneuvered the original Mexican owners and picked up the entire land grant, Torkelson explained. He built a beautiful house in the valley and had a caretaker who lived there named Burton.

Carpentier never sold his land, instead allowing tenant farmers to work it. Up until the 1920s, Torkelson said, the area was filled with pear and walnut orchards. The Sacramento Northern Railroad ran through the area that is now the Lafayette-Moraga trail.

With the demise of the railroad in the 1950s the area began its conversion to suburban land, and allied itself with Lafayette. A 1957 Contra Costa County Public Works photo shows the housing boom taking hold along both sides of St. Mary's Road near Glenside Drive at the present day community center. Even today Burton Valley remains a neighborhood of predominantly single story ranch homes.

Las Trampas Creek and Grizzly Creek wind through the area. Lafayette Community and Senior Services Center is housed in what was once Burton Grammar School. There are two neighborhood pools - Las Trampas and Rancho Colorados Swim and Tennis Club. Hunsaker Canyon Road, named after another early resident, winds its way into hills to the south. Merriewood Elementary and Fairview Junior High were once housed on Burton Valley Elementary School land.

The Merriewood name today refers to a a nursery school and day care facility. Longtime Burton Valley resident and realtor Diana Parker jokingly said Burton Valley is such a coveted address that homeowners often describe the area as encompassing "anything within a 15 mile radius."

Parker moved into her home on the south end during the second phase of home construction in the early 1970s. She recalls rattlesnakes slithering beneath Eucalyptus trees, and red tail deer, hawk and fox making homes near today's baseball fields.

"The schools were great," Parker said. "It was a real 'Leave it to Beaver' environment," with stay-at-home moms. "Nobody had a gardener," she added.

In the 1970s homes could be purchased for about \$44,000, Parker said. Today Burton Valley homes sell from \$900,000 to \$2.4 million dollars, said realtor Dana Green, adding the majority of sales prices fall between \$1.1 and \$1.5 million dollars.

Jon Wheeler moved to Burton Valley in 2002, in part to take advantage of the Lafayette school system. While he said the neighborhood has a reputation of being pretty quiet, "the people are super friendly and always looking out for each other. Even if you forgot to ask, your newspaper gets picked up when you're gone," he said.

Carol Spiering's family didn't even realize Burton Valley existed when they first moved in 16 years ago. "It's been a wonderful place to raise the kids," she said. Spiering said moving in felt like "the old times" - the area was a safe haven where neighbors watched out for each other's children while they biked to school, to a neighborhood pool or played in the hills.

"A lot of families who move here have similar values," Spiering said. She still enjoys seeing families trick-or-treating along Merriewood Drive on Halloween or watching "dads in suits and ties" walk their young children to Burton Valley Elementary on the first day of school. Spiering said many families elect to remain even after their children complete high school.

The area is "a nice mixture of young and old," agreed Green, who posts a Burton Valley video on her real estate website ([www.danagreenteam.com/neighborhoods/burton-valley](http://www.danagreenteam.com/neighborhoods/burton-valley)). Green said "there's always life in Burton Valley."

To prove her point she ticked off a list of activities, from the parade of kids walking to school, joggers, lemonade stands, and block parties, to the near-legendary Burton Valley trick-or-treating experience. "It truly is an old-fashioned neighborhood which attracts families living and interacting," she said, adding that Burton Valley residents are "welcoming, friendly, and excited to be part of the community."

The Lafayette Historical Society recently hosted a presentation on the Sacramento Northern railroad line. More photos are available online at [www.eastbayhillsproject.org](http://www.eastbayhillsproject.org).



Lafayette Community Park Photos Cathy Dausman



A Burton Valley Elementary School statue seems to capture the essence of a child's summer.

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