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Uniting Lamorinda's Past and Present

By Laurie Snyder



The joy of work done and relaxation begun. "The Fandango," painted by Charles Christian Nahl in 1873, depicts Californios dancing at a fiesta as vaqueros finish branding their cattle. Oil on canvas, E.B. Crocker Collection. Image used with special permission from the Crocker Art Museum.

this unique evening," said FJMA president, Kent Long. "The Buehler House is one of only two Frank Lloyd Wright homes in the Bay Area." Over the years, its doors have been opened to the public only a handful of times - most often for charitable events or for members of heritage societies and the media.

Wright birthed the house in 1948 for the late Maynard and Kate Buehler, one of just 60 Usonian or "New World" homes built by the architectural icon beginning in the mid-1930s. The interior, for which Wright also designed furniture, evokes an intimate connection to the outdoors - more than three acres of Orinda's spectacular landscape made all the more extraordinary by the presence of an exquisite Japanese teahouse created by Henry Matsutani, designer of the famed Japanese Gardens at Golden Gate Park.

It is in the midst of this modernity where guests will be time warped back through Lamorinda's storied beginnings to experience two of the region's key periods in history. Specially guided tours of the Wright House interior will begin with a champagne reception at 5 p.m. General admission visitors will then learn more about plans for the adobe's restoration and experience a contemporary Fandango, including Spanish dances performed by the Baile Folklorico de San Panchos, as they explore Wright House grounds from 7 to 10 p.m.

The Fandango, originally a mid-18th century style of dance in Spain and Portugal, became something far more special during California's Rancho and Gold Rush periods - multi-day, colorful events filled with games, good food and electrifying horse races held in honor of births, baptisms, weddings, holidays, or just simply in celebration of hard work done well during difficult times. Evenings sparkled with women garbed in their most gorgeous attire, gliding gracefully across the dance floor in the arms of gallant soldiers and other young men. The first dance traditionally began with the lady of the house, who then invited others to join her. The second often involved stylized movements of fans and skirts.

"The present is the ever moving shadow that divides yesterday from tomorrow. In that lies hope." - Frank Lloyd Wright

Like a modern day Brigadoon, Orinda will vanish into the ether Sept. 13 as history lovers embark on a magical journey bridging the past to the city's future. It is on that evening that the Friends of the Joaquin Moraga Adobe hope to resurrect one of the region's grandest traditions - the Fandango - and re-engrave it in the hearts and minds of Lamorindans for decades to come.

The Adobe Friends will hold their very special event at the historic Frank Lloyd Wright Buehler House to help raise funds for the restoration of Contra Costa County's oldest surviving building - the Joaquin Moraga Adobe. Built sometime around 1841 by Don Joaquin Moraga at what is now 24 Adobe Lane in Orinda, the structure has fallen into such disrepair over the years that it is no longer accessible to the general public. The Friends hope not only to halt its decline, but ultimately transform it into a learning center.

"The elegant gardens of the Frank Lloyd Wright Buehler House will provide the backdrop for

The builder of Orinda's adobe, Don Joaquin Moraga, is said to have hosted such joyous affairs that ranchers and their families traveled from as far away as the Central Valley to kick up their heels at his home. His spirit and those of his family are sure to be on hand and roaming the Wright House grounds with the Adobe Friends and their fellow Fandango attendees. Bobbie Landers, a member of Orinda's first city council and former mayor, who was one of the three Orindans who brainstormed Orinda's now regionally cherished Fourth of July celebration, has worked tirelessly to save the adobe. She hopes Lamorindans and other Bay Area residents will turn out to help make history at the 2014 Wright House celebration.

To learn more about the adobe's history, visit the Lamorinda Weekly's archives. To purchase tickets to the Fandango and experience the past becoming prologue, visit www.moragaadobe.org.

The Fandango - About the Image Accompanying This Article

So integral to California's beginnings were Spanish dances that, when Charles Christian Nahl was commissioned by California Supreme Court Justice Edwin Bryant Crocker to create five paintings, he chose to preserve one of the most colorful in oil - the Fandango.

"The Fandango," created in 1873 "reminisces about life on a rancho in California after Mexico won independence from Spain in 1821. It depicts Californios (Mexicans living in California) enjoying a fiesta," according to the curators of Sacramento's Crocker Art Museum. " In the center foreground of the painting, a couple dances the Fandango, a dance that originated in Spain, while in the distance vaqueros round up cattle for branding."

Often described by historians as one of California's first major painters, the German-born Nahl trained initially with his etcher-engraver father, studied in Paris with Horace Vernet and Paul Delaroche, and then emigrated to America in 1849 before heading west where he successfully mined California's vibrant cultural landscape to become a respected chronicler of the Gold Rush era. He depicted "Miners in the Sierra" (1851) and a "Fire in San Francisco Bay" (1856) before creating "The Patriotic Race" (1870), "Sunday Morning in the Mines" (1872), "The Fandango," and other paintings for Crocker.

To learn more, visit the Crocker Art Museum: crockerartmuseum.org.

Reach the reporter at: laurie@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

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