

Published October 13th, 2021

## Historic site of railroad's Moraga Station receives commemorative plaque

By Vera Kochan



Troop 212 Eagle Scout, Mason Fara, commemorates historic site of Moraga Train Station location Photo Vera Kochan

There are no remnants of a train station, let alone any railroad tracks, to mark the existence of the Moraga Station. However, that fact did not deter Eagle Scout Mason Fara of Troop 212 from pursuing his project to acknowledge the location and install a commemorative plaque behind Outdoor Supply Hardware (OSH) and across Viader Drive (originally known as Railroad Avenue) from the Moraga Barn.

Fara's interest in local train history began during a fourth grade field trip to the area that was once the Valle Vista Subdivision. His teacher noted that a train station was previously located in the vicinity. Years later, Fara decided to explore the area when he came upon the ruins of a foundation. Hoping this was the old Valle Vista Station, he contacted Moraga Historical Society Member and local railroad expert Sam Sperry. Although Fara was disappointed to discover that the Valle Vista Station had actually been located on the opposite side of Canyon Road and up on a hillside, he let Sperry convince him

that a plaque to commemorate the Moraga Station was just as important and would be more accessible to history buffs.

"From start to finish, it took me from the end of May or the beginning of June until now [late September] to complete the project," stated Fara. With advice from Sperry, who helped him get property owner Joan Bruzzone's permission for the plaque placement, and an excited OSH staff, the ceremony took place on Sept. 24 in front of a small crowd gathered to witness the event.

When asked whether Fara had an overall interest in history, he replied, "I'm interested in local history. Mentally it was hard making the switch away from what I had thought was the Valle Vista Station to here."

Joan Bruzzone had high praise for teachers who encourage students to learn beyond the classroom. "How vitally important a teacher is, to inspire something like this."

The plaque's informational inscription reads: "Moraga Train Station. On this site was the Moraga Train Station of the Sacramento Northern Railway, a 183-mile railway that connected Oakland and Chico via Sacramento, handling passengers and freight. The station served Moraga Valley from 1913 to 1957."

Moraga Station's last scheduled passenger train departed on June 22, 1941. Freight service continued for nearly 16 years until February 28, 1957 when shortly thereafter both the station and railroad tracks were demolished.

There were 14 stops along the Sacramento Northern's electric train route that was located within Moraga's historic Rancho Laguna de los Palos Colorados. Beginning with Eastport (a corporation yard), Wilcox (a flag stop), Sequoia (originally a flag stop until passengers built a station), Canyon, Pinehurst, Valle Vista, Moraga No. 2 (the only depot on the rancho), Moraga No. 1 (near Willow Spring School), Country Club (originally called Cashion, later replaced by Saint Mary's College), Burton (a passenger station and loading platform), Glenside (flag stop), West Lafayette, Lafayette; and Ralez (Reliez). The completion of the entire Oakland to Sacramento line occurred at 2:24 a.m. on March 2, 1913, when a golden spike was installed in the track. The occasion was marked with an inaugural parade a month later.

Visitors from Oakland often used the train to stop at the Pinehurst and Canyon stations thanks to the three parks (for picnics), two outdoor dance platforms and a saloon within easy distance.

Moraga's station was the largest. The length of two blocks, it included the Moraga Mercantile, the track foreman's home, several bunkhouses, two spurs (a secondary track that branches out from the main line), a cattle corral and a warehouse-packing house during pear and walnut season.

Local high school students used the train to get to Mt. Diablo High School in Concord (the only high school in the area). College students disembarked for studies at the Saint Mary's College Station which had two spurs. One went into the heart of the campus, and the second into a grove of shade trees where it waited between 8 a.m. and 3 p.m. for the student-conductor to join the crew.

Moragans used the Valle Vista and Moraga Stations to travel for work to and from Oakland and San Francisco (by later catching a ferry).

The Burton Station was named after Moraga landowner Horace W. Carpentier's nephew, and had a shipping spur which served as a fruit shed.

The Lafayette Station also served as a power station with accommodations for an engineer.

The Reliez Station's existence was short-lived after being destroyed when a college student's car was thrown against it by a train. It was never rebuilt.

Operating costs began to exceed revenues due to competition from other train lines; and the 1937 opening of the Broadway Low Level Tunnel, later known as the Caldecott Tunnel, had commuters discovering that driving by car was faster than taking the train to Oakland. Within a matter of four years the railway tracks served only freight trains. Sixteen years later, freight service was discontinued as the stations and their connecting tracks were demolished - only to live on in history books and commemorative plaques.

Special thanks to the Moraga Historical Society; and "Moraga's Pride" author Sandy Kimball and Chief Researcher Brother Dennis Goodman F.S.C.

Reach the reporter at: [vera@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:vera@lamorindaweekly.com)

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA