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Surprising discovery unearthed amongst the dried weeds at Los Perales

By Vera Kochan



Photo Vera Kochan

Doing its part to participate in wildfire mitigation measures, the folks at Los Perales Elementary School in Moraga made an unusual and historic discovery.

During the process of performing fire abatement work in the lower field of the campus, the crew discovered a bronze plaque affixed to a medium-sized boulder at the foot of a huge eucalyptus tree. Turning green around the edges thanks to its exposure to the elements, the plaque reads: "Bicentennial Heritage Tree, Eucalyptus Globulus, The Tree Was Planted Circa 1895, Dedicated April 11, 1976."

Administrative Assistant Krystal White, who often takes a walk around the entire campus, took this reporter to the site of the tree and plaque. Neither could find any other clues or markings that might add details as to what organization or individual made the commemoration or how they knew when the tree was planted.

According to "Images of America: Moraga" by Susan K. Skilton, tall trees such as the eucalyptus were planted by farmers and ranchers to help break up occasional wind gusts. "The land where the tree still grows once belonged to rancher James Marion Daley, onetime superintendent of the Moraga School."

As to who placed the commemorative plaque at the base of the tree, Skilton's book explains, "The Moraga Town Council designated this eucalyptus, which dates from at least 1910, the Bicentennial Heritage Tree. At the time of the dedication, the girth of the eucalyptus tree was estimated to be 28 feet and the height 65 feet."

This reporter's search through Moraga Historical Society's Los Perales files did not uncover any additional particulars, and no one at the school has any further information about the 127-year-old tree whose, pardon the pun, roots come from Australia.

Giving a tree the designation of a "Heritage Tree" is not just a whim, according to the Phytosphere Research website. "Individual trees may be considered important community resources because of unique or noteworthy characteristics or values. Such trees have been described in ordinances as heritage, historic, landmark, legacy, special interest, significant, or specimen trees. In some ordinances, trees are simply labeled protected trees." There are several possible criteria used when giving a tree "Heritage" status: size, species, age, historic significance, ecological value, aesthetics, location, required plantings and retained trees, just to name a few.

An odd footnote to the saga is that the tree was planted on land now called Los Perales; English translation: "The Pear Trees".

Special thanks to the Moraga Historical Society.



Photo Vera Kochan

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