



# Joaquin Moraga Adobe Newsletter

Adobe Remodel  
1941

[www.MoragaAdobe.org](http://www.MoragaAdobe.org)

December 2024

## FJMA Takes Ownership of the Moraga Adobe! Tours to Begin in 2025!



FJMA members Bobbie Landers, Lance Beeson and Kent Long celebrate the ribbon cutting at the Adobe.

A huge milestone was accomplished this year. On March 28, 2024 the Friends of the Joaquin Moraga Adobe acquired the newly restored Moraga Adobe and the 2.3 acres property surrounding the building!

On a warm Sunday in June, Orinda Mayor **Darlene Gee**, President of the Moraga Historical Society **Susan Sperry**, President of the Orinda Historical Society **Alison Burns**, members of FJMA, and honored guests were present for a ribbon cutting ceremony which included a preview and walk-through of the interior of the Adobe.

The building's rehabilitation by the **J&J Ranch** developers is complete (and looks amazing!), but there is still work to be done to get the site ready for public visits. Several key landscaping elements need to be completed, such as surfaced gathering areas in the front and rear of the Adobe, split rail fencing, personalized paver installation in the view area, signage, and plantings.

FJMA is working with local native plant specialist **Ryan Cummings** of Cummings Landscape Architecture to develop our design. Many thanks to the **Orinda Community Foundation** who provided a generous grant to support development of the plan, which is currently under review by the City of Orinda.

Inside the Adobe, reproduction furnishings are being added in the three "period" rooms, and displays are being developed for the museum room. FJMA has received a very generous gift from **Joan Bruzzone** to outfit and develop the rotating exhibit room, now named the *Bruzzone Gallery*, as a venue for various changing presentations.

FJMA had hoped to be officially open by the end of this year, but we need to complete some outdoor areas and museum exhibits to properly and safely show off the Adobe. Our current plan is to be open for tours beginning in the spring of 2025. We will make an announcement when our signups and information become available on our website.



June 2024 Ribbon Cutting Ceremony

## Museum Exhibits & Research

The FJMA Museum Committee is busy furnishing and creating display exhibits for the Adobe. We already have some wonderful items that have been donated, such as 1800s style rawhide chairs, a traditional wooden table, an early 19th century Chinoiserie sewing table, a rawhide lariat, Rancho era pottery, an 1845 hand loomed coverlet, and metate stones used for processing grain. These are just a sampling of donated items thanks to **Lance Beeson & Marilyn Merlino, Steven & Josie Kelley, and John Grafton**. If you are wondering how a Chinese sewing table might have been found in a California Adobe, the Moraga family raised cattle for the worldwide hide and tallow trade, thus they had access to many international goods brought by ships that anchored in San Francisco Bay in the 1800s.



FJMA Museum Committee meeting in the *Bruzzone Gallery* room

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Friends of the Joaquin Moraga Adobe — PO Box 872 Orinda, CA 94563

## Letter From Our President

Dear Friends and Adobe Supporters -

In 2024, FJMA successfully completed what is by far the most important step in our effort to save the Moraga Adobe, the final purchase of the Adobe and surrounding 2+ acres. After more than 15 years of planning, negotiating, and fundraising, it is incredibly exciting to finally be focused on getting the museum open for you all!

Of course, this is only possible thanks to all our generous donors, our board of directors, and the growing group of volunteers who support this project. In particular, I want to thank our Secretary **Jeff Boero** who over-saw the completion of the rehabilitation and security system installation, and our Treasurer **Margaret Beck** who smoothly managed the purchase close and was even able to find us reasonable fire and liability coverage - not an easy task in Orinda these days!

An impromptu highlight for me was giving our first "school tour" in the Spring, shortly after we completed the purchase. I was weed whacking at the Adobe when car loads of 3rd graders and their teachers started showing up – they were from Rheem Elementary School and had been given a map of historical Moraga sites to see. Although they were just expecting to do a drive-by of the Adobe, I invited them in to see the interior of the building, which was still completely empty. Despite the lack of any displays or furnishings, the kids were thrilled just to be inside the old Adobe and hear some of its history. Seeing the smiles on their faces reassured me that this whole project will indeed be worth it!

When we completed the purchase in March, we imagined that we would be able to open the Adobe before the end of this year. While we haven't quite reached that goal, I can confidently say I expect to greet you all at the Adobe in 2025!

Kent Long, FJMA President



## Museum Exhibits & Research

(cont'd from page 1)



John Grafton with rawhide chairs that he restrung.

The traditional "period" rooms in the Adobe will be outfitted largely based on author Joseph Lamson's description of his visit to the Moraga Adobe on New Years Eve, 1855. Reproductions are being made including two rawhide beds with straw mattresses for the bedroom.

Volunteers have been doing research and gathering photos and copies of original documents. One important example is a high-resolution digital image, purchased from the Bancroft Library, of the map (called a diseño) used in the 1835 petition by Joaquin Moraga and Juan Bernal for the 13,000 acre Laguna de los Palos Colorados land grant.

A documentary film about the Moraga family is currently being produced. by museum committee member **David Anaya**.

Many interesting references to the Adobe have been discovered in online newspaper archives. The *Orinda Sun* article below describes the childhood memories (c.1885) from Olive Moraga, great granddaughter of Joaquin Moraga, who was a guest at the Adobe's California Landmark plaque dedication ceremony in 1954:

**Pioneer Moraga Adobe Is Dedicated by Society**  
 By GLADYS SHALLY

Two direct descendants of Jose Joaquin Moraga, founder of San Francisco, were present at the Contra Costa Historical Society's dedication ceremonies Sunday, May 25, when a bronze memorial plaque was placed on the walls of the 110-year-old Moraga Adobe.

Miss Olive Moraga, now of San Francisco, granddaughter of Joaquin Moraga who built the adobe in 1841 on the Rancho Laguna de los Palos Colorados, returned to her former home and brought an oil painting of her father and her mother, as well as her brother, Lt. Col. Rufus Moraga of Tracy, newly made in General Moraga's family of seven children.

One of seven of the original 37 historic adobe in the county still standing, the Moraga adobe's two-foot-thick walls are now part of the beautiful home of Mr. and Mrs. William Thurston White, Jr., who were hosts at the occasion. Restoration was made in 1941 by Katherine Brown White Irvine.

**Chairmen Named**  
 L. M. FERRARI, member of a Five Community Advancement

June 1954 *Orinda Sun*  
 Moraga Adobe Dedication

The original adobe building, said Miss Moraga, was constructed entirely by Moraga Indians - some 300 living on the rancho. The hilltop site for the house was also selected by them - a strategic position in case of hostile Indian attack. She remembers the colorful display of her grandmother's rose garden below the house—60 varieties all sent over from Spain. Her outstanding memory is of the last grand ball held in the old adobe (just before her family was evicted and she went to live with her grandfather John Olive on the old Fish Ranch). Aroused from sleep by her grandfather Moraga so that she might, with him, lead the grand march, she recalls insisting that first her hair be dusted with 'sparkles' like the other ladies - and she was the four-year-old 'belle of the ball.'

From an *Orinda Sun* article by Gladys Shally, June 4th 1954



## Community Connections



DAR members at the Adobe, November 2024

FJMA continues to engage with many community organizations.

The **Acalanes Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution** recently visited the Adobe to see the replacement landmark plaques that they generously funded. They have also expressed interest in becoming docents for the museum.

FJMA is collaborating with the **Contra Costa Historical Society** on their Rancho Project, an online record of all the land grants in Contra Costa County.

This year, FJMA had information booths at Orinda's 4th of July parade and Wagner Ranch Nature Area. FJMA President **Kent Long** continues to spread the word about the Moraga Adobe and its history as a guest speaker for many organizations, including local garden clubs, Lafayette Presbyterian Church, Lamorinda SIR, Los Californianos, and the California Genealogy Society.

## Establishing Partnerships

We are excited to be working with **St Mary's College** on a partnership arrangement where archeology students can utilize the adobe site.

Artifacts collected on-site will be identified, cataloged and recorded by students at the college's archeology lab. St Mary's professor of Anthropology, **Cynthia Van Gilder** and FJMA have been in talks to establish a program where students can do an on-site archeological dig as part of their curriculum.



Artifacts found in 2020

During the Adobe rehabilitation, construction crews did unearth some artifacts, but it is thought that the slope below the Adobe might have more potential for findings. Even if no more significant artifacts are discovered, the Adobe can still be an excellent resource to learn archeology in the field.

## California State Grant

Many thanks to our local California State Senator, **Steve Glazer**, who applied for a California State Park grant on behalf of FJMA in 2021. This acquisition grant required the purchase to close before the funds could be released.

In June, Senator Glazer presented us with a check for \$250,000 from the State of California which helps offset the purchase price of the Adobe. This means we still have funds after the purchase to undertake immediate landscaping and exhibit projects without delay.



Senator Steve Glazer and FJMA members, June 2024

## Thank You to our Recent Donors

- David G. Anderson & Nancy Kaible
- Margaret Beck
- John Bernstein & Jean Box
- Joan Bruzzone
- Holly & Buddy Burke
- Maralyn Burr
- California Genealogy Society
- DAR, Acalanes Chapter
- DAR, Mt. Diablo Chapter
- Mark Whatley & Danuta Zaroda
- John Diestler
- Dirt Daubers Garden Club
- Grace Edinboro
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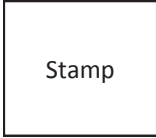
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**Special thanks to Andrew Goett of Pacific Printing for printing this publication.**

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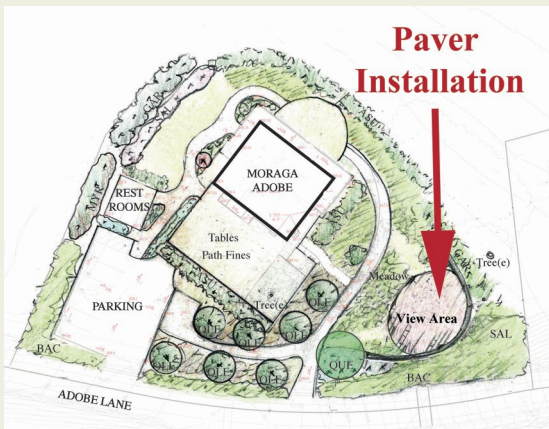


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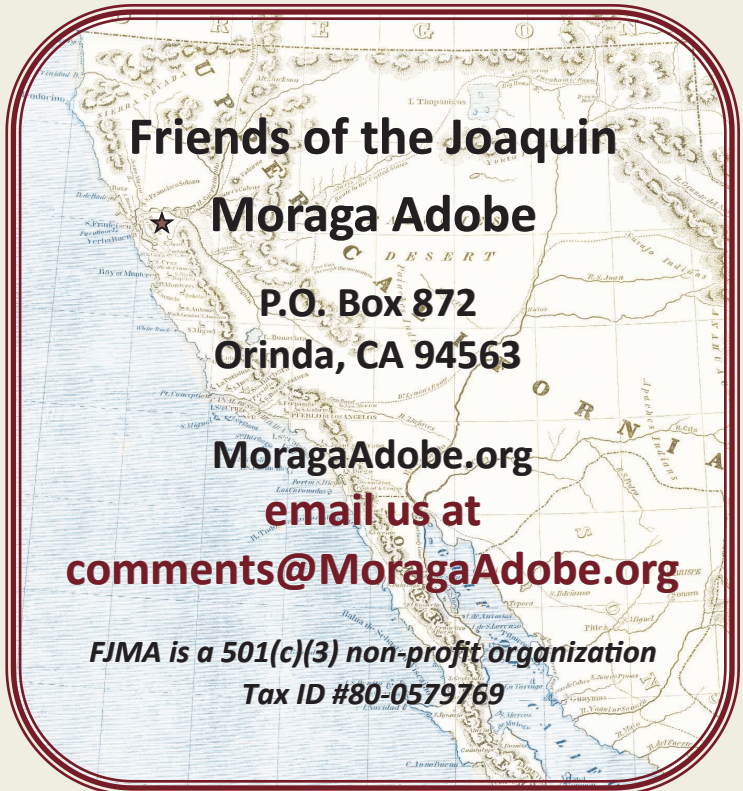


**Deadline to purchase a paver for  
FJMA's initial installation:  
January 15, 2025!**

**Go to [MoragaAdobe.org](http://MoragaAdobe.org):  
click on "Buy a Paver"**



Site of our first paver installation is the view area.  
This is a spot with particularly scenic views of  
Moraga Valley, Mt Diablo and Las Trampas hills.



**Friends of the Joaquin**

**Moraga Adobe**

**P.O. Box 872**

**Orinda, CA 94563**

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**FJMA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization**

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