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## Moraga's 2020 Pear & Wine Festival another COVID-19 casualty

By Vera Kochan



The few remaining pear trees from the Moraga Company's once vast orchards. Photo Vera Kochan

Planted by James Irvine in 1913 for his Moraga Company, a ranch and agribusiness nearly 11,000 acres in size, the crops also included walnuts, apples, peaches, apricots, beans and beets.

Sold under the name Moraga Pears, the fruit was the largest pear operation in the state between 1914 and 1944 and became world famous. According to former Moraga Historical Society archivist Elsie Mastick, "It was the largest distribution of pears in the world." Trains came through town loading up on fruit that would be destined for the East Coast and beyond, as well as local canneries such as Del Monte in Oakland.

According to information gathered from the MHS, when Utah Mining and Construction bought the 5,000 acres of pear orchards in 1953 only 150 acres of pear trees remained. More trees were cut down and replaced by shopping centers and subdivisions. By 1974, pear harvests were discontinued and the remaining trees were left standing untended. Of the original 38 pear orchards, only a handful of trees still remain.

Today a few lucky Moraga homeowners can say with pride, "I have a Moraga Company pear tree still bearing fruit in my backyard." This reporter is one of them.

The annual Pear Festival began in 1999 by then-Moraga residents Tom and Stephanie Smith. By 2003, Moraga Parks Foundation took the helm. Once a pear tree is planted, it can produce fruit for nearly 200 years. That's good news for the town of Moraga, which can look forward to a Pear & Wine Festival at least through the year 2113.

Note: Additional research for this article provided by MHS President Susan Sperry.

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