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The Valle Vista subdivision - Moraga's own Lost City of Atlantis

By Vera Kochan



A drought stricken portion of Upper San Leandro Reservoir after passing Valle Vista with the town of Moraga in the background.? Photo Vera Kochan

More than 100 years ago there existed an area of land known as Subdivision No. 3 called Valle Vista. Originally owned by the Moraga Company, which is famously recognized as the agricultural firm responsible for the town's early pear and walnut orchards, Valle Vista began in 1914 and included as many as 98 lots averaging one and two acres each. It is estimated that at least 58 families had houses there with some having purchased multiple lots that were sold for approximately \$500 each. Most of the community of Valle Vista, much like the Lost City of Atlantis, is now under water, and anyone would be hard pressed to find remnants of its existence. But, the truth is out there.

If driving to Oakland via Canyon Road, one will notice the Valle Vista Staging Area located less than a mile from Canyon Bridge on the left hand side, where a large dirt parking lot stands welcoming the cars of hikers wanting to trek the trails currently owned by East Bay Municipal Utility District.

The land was originally owned by Joaquin Moraga and his cousin Juan Bernal in 1835, as part of the 13,316 acre land grant from the Mexican government. It was sold twice before it was eventually bought by the Moraga Land Company in 1913. Soon the area was mapped out in preparation for the subdivision.

Several of the new homeowners commuted to work, and in order to accommodate the increasing need to connect the Lamorinda area with Oakland and beyond, the Oakland-Antioch and Eastern Railroad (later called Sacramento Northern Railroad), built stations at Pinehurst, Valle Vista, Moraga (across from Moraga Barn), and Burton. The Valle Vista station was located across the street from the current hikers' staging area, above Canyon Road on the hill.

Valle Vista had seven main streets, five of which connected to Canyon Road. There were also two main creeks running through the tract: Moraga Creek and San Leandro Creek. EBMUD's predecessor in the 1920s was East Bay Water Company. In 1923, it decided to create a reservoir (Upper San Leandro Reservoir) alongside Valle Vista and began buying up the low-lying properties of the vicinity in order to protect the purity of the drinking water. By 1926, while creating the reservoir, the two creeks were flooded, as expected, resulting in many of the abandoned homes currently lying under water. EBMUD continued to purchase more properties in Valle Vista through subsequent decades.

Who were the people of Valle Vista? In an upcoming Lamorinda Weekly article, details of Subdivision No. 3's former residents will be revealed.?

Special thanks to Moraga Historical Society President Susan Sperry, Historical Society Member Sam Sperry, EBMUD Ranger Naturalist II Leatha Harris and Moraga Boy Scout Troop 212's Eagle Scout Mason Fara.

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