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# *Sourisseau Academy*

*Smith-Layton Archive presents:*

# Morgan Hill

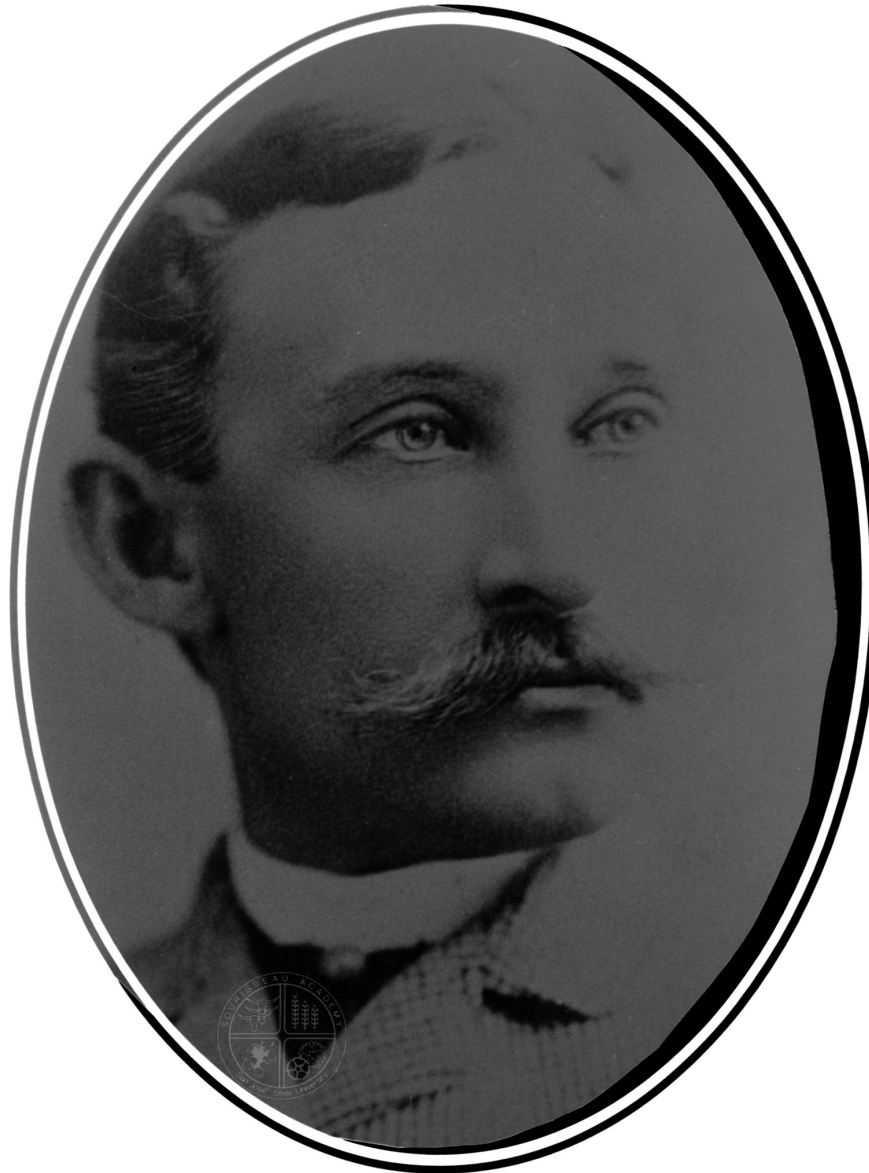
by Beth Wyman

*Les Amis (The Friends)*

*June 2017*

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[57] **Hiram Morgan Hill.** The town of Morgan Hill was named after Hiram Morgan Hill at its incorporation in November 1906. In 1882, Hill, a San Francisco bank clerk, married Diana Murphy, the granddaughter of pioneer Martin Murphy Sr. This fortuitous marriage made him one of the richest men in the area. Murphy Sr., an Irish immigrant, bought the almost 9,000 acre Mexican land grant, Ojo de Agua de la Coche, from Juan Maria Hernandez in 1846 for \$1,500. His family eventually owned most of southern Santa Clara County, from Coyote to Gilroy. The "Murphy Era" of development and influence extended from 1844 to the early 1900s.

June 2017



[58] **Orchards and Homes at the Foot of Murphy's Peak, 1910.** Orchards and homes surround the town's iconic mountain known as Murphy's Peak, but today it is officially named El Toro according to the US Geological Survey. Influenced by tantalizing railroad flyers, settlers began to arrive to the Morgan Hill area in the early years of the 20th century. They cleared the land, often removing centuries-old oak trees to build homes and plant prune orchards. Some of the earliest observers, the diarists for the Juan Bautista de Anza exploring party who camped at Llagas Creek in 1775, noted the extensive "oak forest" on the east side of what is now Morgan Hill. A woman who was born in Morgan Hill in the early 1900s recalled being frightened when driving through the forest with her father to visit a friend.

June 2017



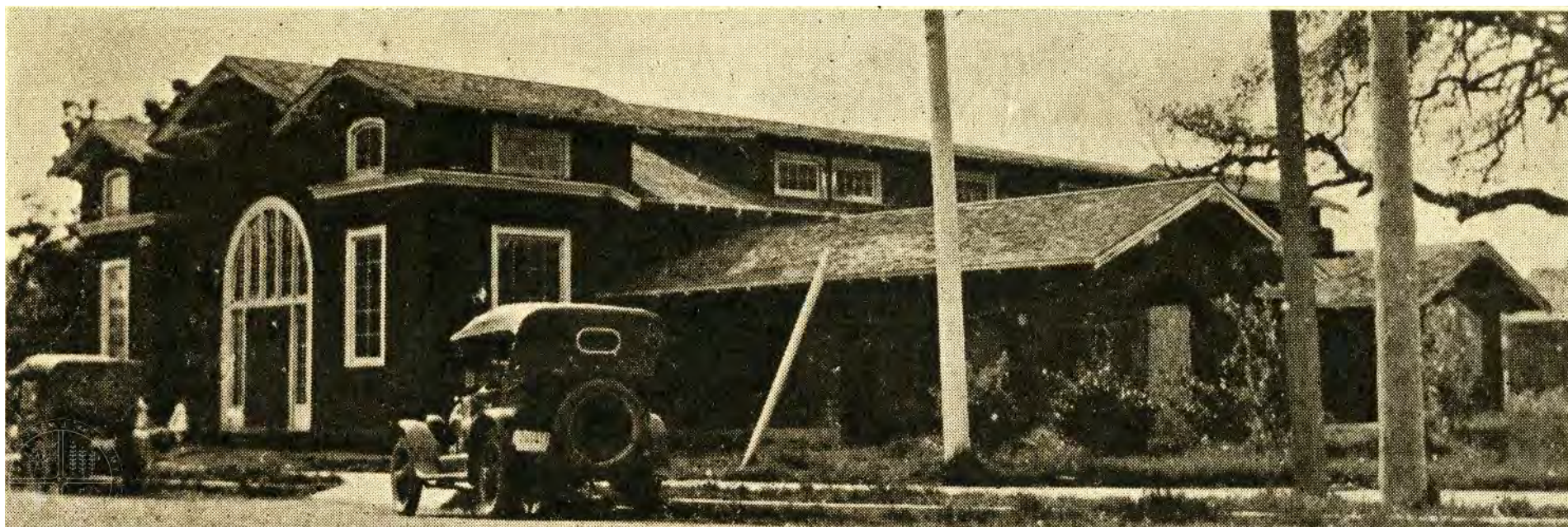
[59] **Panorama, Morgan Hill, 1913.** Monterey Road or El Camino Real, the original route of the early Spanish expeditions, runs through downtown Morgan Hill. In this photo orchards in bloom surround the tiny town. One enterprising orchardist, Joel Ransom of the adjacent Madrone area, planted 270 acres in French prunes, reportedly the largest prune orchard in the world. The town's incorporation in 1906 was a hotly contested issue between the farmers who did not want sidewalks, sewers, a water system, and higher taxes and the town people who differed. The town people won by a narrow margin and immediately installed sidewalks, sewers, water system, and raised taxes.



[60] **Bank of Morgan Hill, 1908.** Designed by San Jose architects Wolfe & McKenzie, construction of the two-story Bank of Morgan Hill was begun by the Votaw brothers in 1905. At the time of the San Francisco earthquake on April 18, 1906, the second story was unfinished and collapsed into the street, requiring the bank to be rebuilt.



[61] **The Votaw Building, 1922.** Opened in 1906 as the Bank of Morgan Hill, the building subsequently became a branch of Bank of California and then later, Bank of America. Throughout the years the building has remained in continuous use.

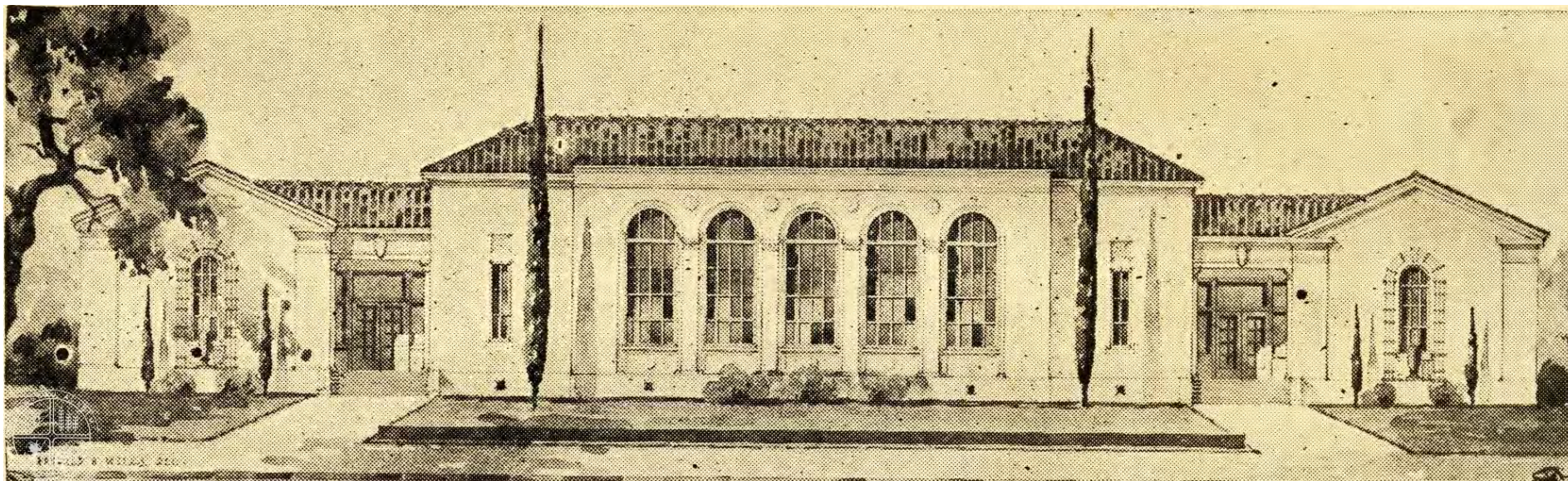


[62] **The Friendly Inn, 1922.** This Friendly Inn was the original Morgan Hill community center. It was built and maintained with financial assistance from Gladys Cochrane Jackson, who owned a substantial ranch nearby.



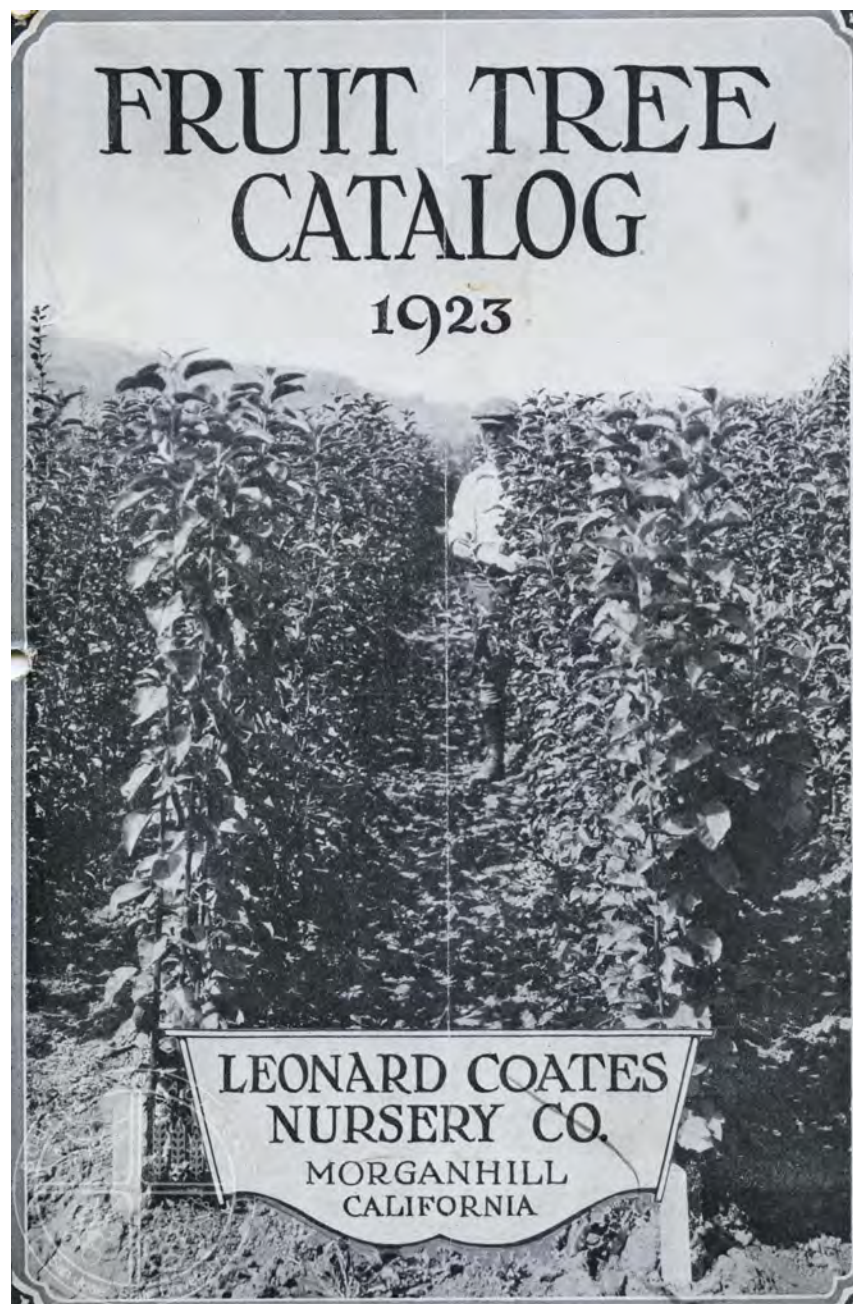
[63] **Live Oak High School, 1922.** Live Oak High School, Morgan Hill's first high school, was located between Central Avenue and Keystone Street along Monterey Road. The second high school was built in a newer building on the same site in the 1930s.





[64] **Morgan Hill Grammar School, Architectural Rendering, 1922.** Located along Monterey Road at the northeast corner of Monterey and Dunne Avenue, Morgan Hill Grammar School was completed in 1924 as the third grammar school for the growing town. It was designed by the prolific northern California architect, William H. Weeks. In the 1990s the school was closed and its fate uncertain. After years of debate, the City purchased the property in 1997 in order to build a Cultural and Community Center. Funded with money from private investors, the historic building was moved in 13 pieces to Llagas Valley in 2001. Now restored, it serves the community again as an elementary school. This project received a well-deserved Governor's Award of Excellence in Historic Preservation in November 2003.

June 2017



[65] **Leonard Coates Nursery Company, 1923.** The Leonard Coates Nursery Company produced the variety of prune that became the standard for Santa Clara County growers.

June 2017



[66] **Grounds of the Leonard Coates Nursery Company, 1920 - 30.** The Leonard Coates Nursery orchard was located northwest of Knob Hill between Main and Dunne Avenues.

*June 2017*



[67] **Blossoming Prune Trees in Morgan Hill, 1922.** Vast prune orchards covered the entire landscape of Santa Clara County, which became known as "The Prune Capital of the World." A favorite spring-time expedition for valley residents was to travel along Monterey and Blossom Hill Roads to view the spectacular display of orchards in bloom.



[68] **Drying Prunes, 1922.** Prunes were harvested by manual labor. Whole families were employed and school year did not begin until the harvest was finished. The trees were shaken, the fruit picked from the ground, then subjected to a scalding in a prune dipper to soften the tough skins. Then the harvest was laid out on flats to dry in the sun.



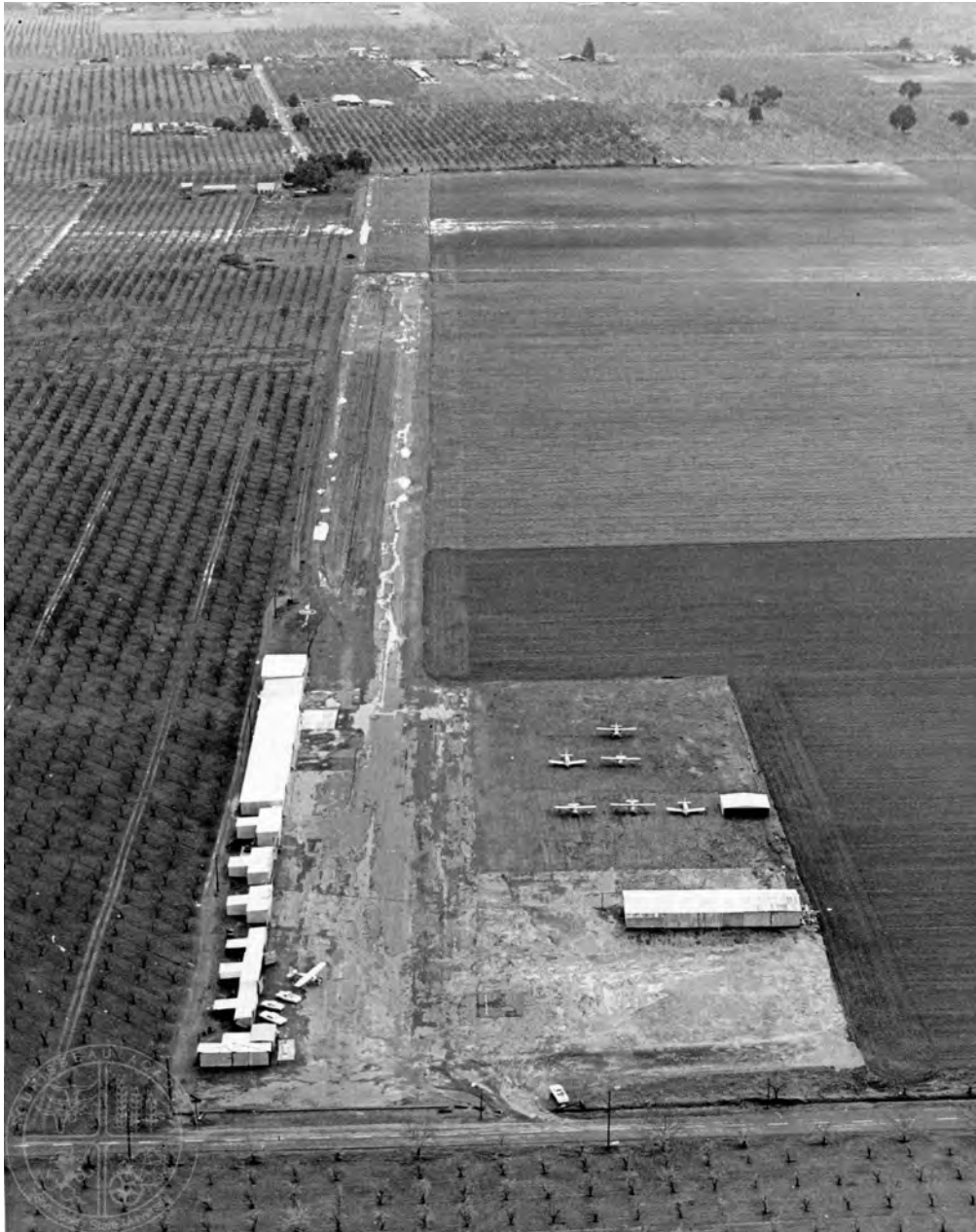
[69] **Morgan Hill Railroad Station, 1949.** The railroad was extended from San Jose to Gilroy in 1869. The Morgan Hill Depot was located a block east of Monterey Road at Fourth and Depot Street. The original depot is gone but today trains continue to run regularly through the town of Morgan Hill.

June 2017



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[70] **Anderson Lake, 1969.** The post World War II era was defined by major new projects such as Anderson Dam, built in 1950. Coyote Creek and four of its tributaries fed the lake behind the dam. The lake would have submerged the original Cochrane house, located along Coyote Creek. The house, now known as the Jackson House, was relocated to a hillside on the east side of the lake along East Dunne Avenue, and is owned by Santa Clara County Parks.



[71] **Morgan Hill Airport, 1965.** Morgan Hill Airport was located at the intersection of Monterey and Cochrane Roads and was active until the post-war construction boom reached southern Santa Clara County in the 1970s. In 1980, the airport was closed and the property re-zoned to accommodate a major business park.