

# Washington Township Historical Society



## MAY - JUNE 2021

VOL. 45

NO. 03

PRES.: JOHN WEED

(510) 651-2482

V.P.: PAUL SETHY

(510) 656-4075

REC. SEC.: TIM SWENSON

(510) 489-8944

TREAS.: DON BARSII

(510) 342-8355

**MEETING DATE: MONDAY, MAY 24, 2021, 7:00 PM**  
**LIVE ON ZOOM, <https://us04web.zoom.us/j/76473734687>**

Washington Township Historical Society Editor: Al Minard

Our Guest speaker for the May 24, 2021 meeting on Zoom, will be Dr. **JOYCE BLUEFORD** or one of her staff members at the Fremont Math Science Nucleus Museum. Dr. Blueford and her staff have done a tremendous amount of work at the California Nursery and have consistently moved this project forward. There is major work going on at this site and there is a lot more to do especially with regarding the preservation of the historic trees on this site, and the tons of paper to process and archive.

**Dear Washington Township Historical Society members and friends,**

Our Zoom meeting on May 24, 2021 will start promptly at 7:00 PM. Our speaker will be someone from the California Nursery. We are including some information about this rather new historical park here in Fremont. Dr. Joyce Blueford has been actively involved with this project and has done a fantastic job of gathering documents and artifacts that Bruce Roeding had saved in a large trailer.

We are still dealing with the Covid 19 pandemic and we hope that you have taken the opportunity to get vaccinated. There is no cost to anyone getting the vaccine and it is available to anyone over 16 years of age.

We are waiting for actual meetings where we can see and talk to everyone in the same room

to work on the merger with the Washington Township Museum of Local History.

When the economy picks up again we hope to have a large celebration for the third historical plaque that we purchased two years ago. We are planning on putting this plaque on the Bronco Billy Pizza Palace in Union City. The owner wants to do some landscaping before we install the plaque, but it will happen.

Some of you have access to a computer or smart phone so you can attend our Zoom meeting. We have noticed that we are getting some people from out of the area attending these meetings and we are honored. We are saddened for those of you who are unable to attend our meetings. For those attending we have had good responses which makes the historical society look good. Thanks to our speakers and presenters.

# History of the California Nursery

The 20-acre property is the last remnant of the original 463 acre California Nursery Company, a once grand nursery operation that brought national attention to the East Bay and was significantly associated with the evolution of the nursery industry on a statewide level.

The story of the California Nursery site involves great personalities such as Jose de Jesus Vallejo, John Rock, George Roeding, and Luther Burbank and associations with historical events such as the 1893 Columbia Exposition, development of Golden Gate Park, the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition, and the Golden Gate International Expositions of 1939 and 1940.

In 1884 a German immigrant named John Rock purchased 463 acres on a site that is today known as the town of Niles in Fremont. He moved his start-up nursery from San Jose and named it “The California Nursery Company.” Rock set about to create the best known Nursery Company in the State of California and became the premier supplier of fruit and nut trees. He marketed and hybridized 100’s of plant varieties with the assistance of the famous botanist Luther Burbank of Santa Rosa. In addition to fruit trees, the California Nursery became known for ornamental shrubs and 100’s of varieties of roses. Rock is thought to be responsible for introducing more new plants into the State than any other nurseryman.

In 1917 another legend took over ownership of the California Nursery Company, named George Roeding. Combined with the Roeding operations in Fresno, the California Nursery Company dominated the fruit and nut tree national market at a pivotal time when private agriculture was emerging as large corporate businesses. By the 1940’s George Roeding Jr. had evolved the company into an enormous retail operation with nurseries and growing grounds from the State of Washington to South America. All of this was headquartered out of Niles California.

Over the years the grounds of California Nursery were frequented by famous people that were customers or were otherwise associated with the California Nursery. They include President Woodrow Wilson, Phoebe and Randolph Hearst, Leland Stanford, John McLaren (the first Superintendent of Golden Gate Park), Architect Johannes Reimers, and photographers Andrew Hill and Gabriel Moulin.

Palm trees from the California Nursery became the “Avenue of Palms” at the 1915 Panama Pacific Exposition in San Francisco. Plants and Oak trees from the Nursery were used in the 1939/40 International Exposition at Treasure Island. Innovations in plant shipping were developed in the packing shed on the site. Peach pits from California Nursery were used in gas masks in World War I. These and many other stories are waiting to be told.

The location of the Nursery site in the historic Niles District adds further distinction to the area, which is already rich in its cultural and commercial historical assets. The California Nursery site is poised to accentuate the existing Historic Niles District, as well as stand on its own as a significant historical asset and statewide destination.

## Historical and Landmark Trees

The City of Fremont places great value in promoting and protecting its historical or landmark trees. In the early 1970s, a group called the City Beautiful Committee gathered information and documented various tree species and their locations which were published by the City of Fremont in 1973 in a booklet titled Landmark Trees City of Fremont. This booklet has recently been updated to “retire” trees which have not stood the test of time, and to include new landmark trees. This new publication is available online in its entirety here: : [Landmark Tree Publication “https://fremont.gov/DocumentCenter/View/18448/0\\_Landmark-Trees-Publication-2011?bidId=](https://fremont.gov/DocumentCenter/View/18448/0_Landmark-Trees-Publication-2011?bidId=)”

## Tree Survey completed by HortScience

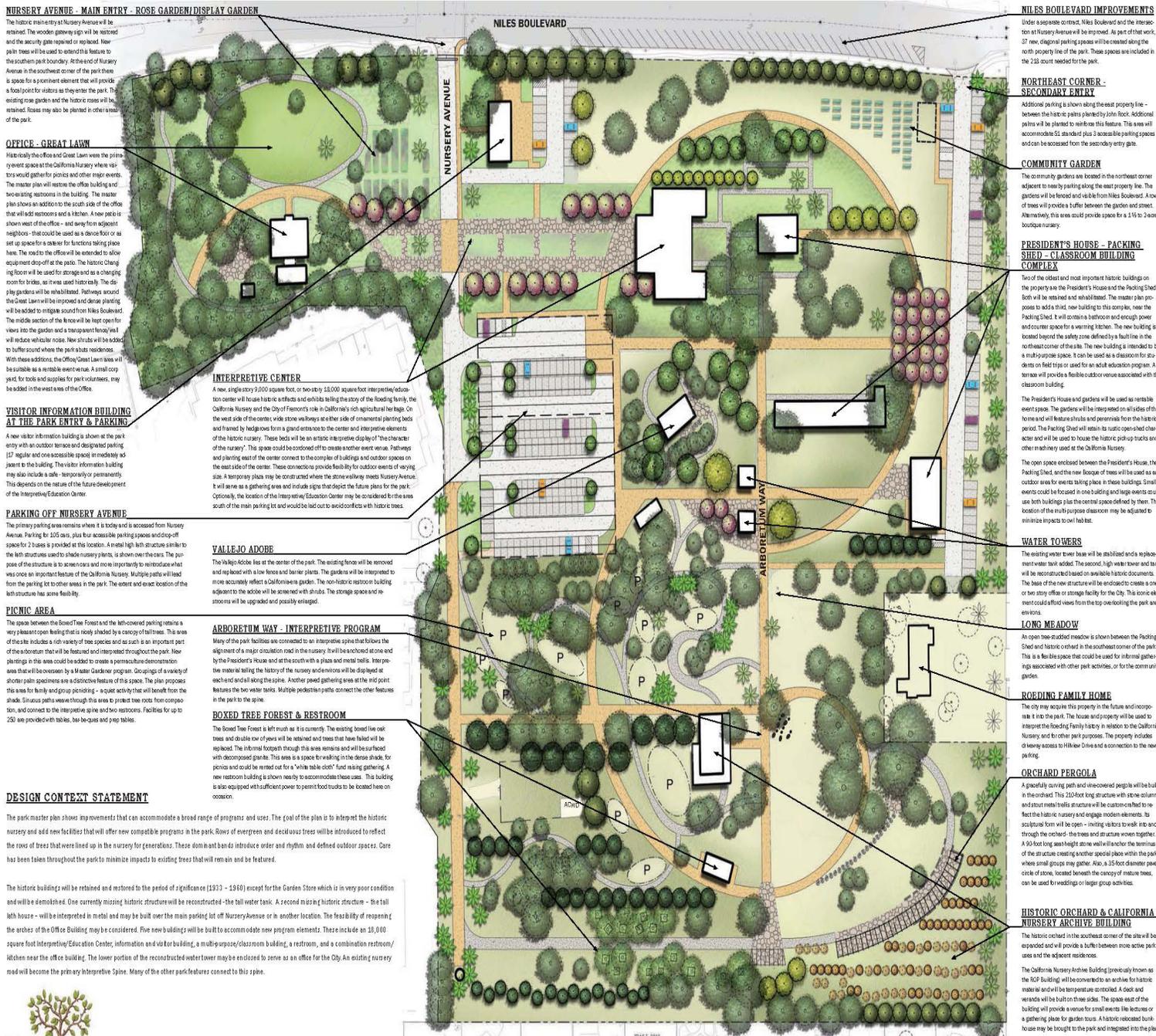
HortScience, Inc, a leading horticultural consultancy company from Pleasanton, completed a pro bono tree survey for the City, assessing all of the 756 trees at the CA Nursery. The survey matches up with the numbers on the trees on the Self-Guided Walking Tour and Landmark Tree Map noted above.

A few years ago, Dr. Joyce Blueford, of the local Math Science Nucleus, befriended the grandson (Bruce) of George Roeding Sr. Through that relationship, and with the assistance of the late Lila Bringham, she began a process of slowly uncovering what would later become an enormous collection of artifacts chronicling the history and operations of the once Grand California Nursery Company. With Dr. Blueford’s assistance, the City began to realize the important story that this site has to tell Fremont residents, the region, and world. Suddenly, what had been locally regarded as a lovely passive 20 acre site

with majestic trees and old nursery buildings, became a historical treasure trove the likes of which are seldom discovered in today's world.

The primary purpose of this Master Plan is to tell the story of the California Nursery Company to current and future generations through the sharing of the site's remaining historic buildings, majestic arboricultural resources, and display of the carefully preserved artifacts and documents. This Plan seeks to blend this overarching historical theme with the many uses

existing on the site today, including educational tours, community gardens, wedding and events, various volunteer efforts such as those that manage the rose garden, and possibly reinstating a small retail nursery presence on the site. The plan proposes a thoughtful measured increase in activity to the site, promoting awareness of the stunning community resources present on the site, and to generate modest income to support on-going maintenance and operations for future generations.



**NURSERY AVENUE - MAIN ENTRY - ROSE GARDEN DISPLAY GARDEN**

The historic main entry at Nursery Avenue will be retained. The wooden gateway will be restored and the security gate replaced or replaced. New palm trees will be used to extend the feature to the southern park boundary. At the end of Nursery Avenue in the southeast corner of the park there is a space for a prominent element that will provide a focal point for visitors as they enter the park. The existing rose garden and the historic rose will be retained. Roses may also be planted in other areas of the park.

**OFFICE - GREAT LAW**

Historically the Great Law has been the primary event space at the California Nursery where visitors would gather for picnics and other events. The master plan will restore the office building and two existing restrooms in the building. The master plan shows an addition to the south side of the office that will add restrooms and a kitchen. A new walkway is shown west of the office - and away from adjacent neighbors - that could be used as a dance floor or as a set up space for a cafe for functions taking place here. The master plan will be updated to allow equipment drop-off at the past. The historic changing room will be used for storage and as a changing room for brides, as it was used historically. The display garden will be rehabilitated. Pathways around the Great Law will be improved and dense planting will be added to mitigate sound from Niles Boulevard. The middle section of the fence will be kept open for views into the garden and a transparent fence will reduce vehicle noise. New shrubs will be added to buffer sound where the park abuts residences. With these additions, the Office/Great Law area will be suitable as a reliable event venue. A small copy yard, for tools and supplies for park volunteers, may be added in the west area of the Office.

**VISITOR INFORMATION BUILDING AT THE PARK ENTRY & PARKING**

A new visitor information building is shown at the park entry with an outdoor terrace and designated parking (17 regular and one accessible space) immediately adjacent to the building. The visitor information building may also include a cafe, restrooms or permanently. This depends on the final site and future development of the Interpretive Education Center.

**PARKING OFF NURSERY AVENUE**

The primary parking area remains where it is today and is accessed from Nursery Avenue. Parking for 105 cars, plus two accessible parking spaces and drop-off space for 2 buses is provided at the location. A small high lift structure similar to the lift structures used to shade nursery plants, is shown over the cars. The purpose of the structure is to screen noise and more importantly to reintroduce what was once an important feature of the California Nursery. Multiple paths will lead to the drop-off area to other areas in the park. The west and east sections of the lift structure has some feasibility.

**PICNIC AREA**

The space between the Bowd Tree Forest and the left-covered parking retains a very pleasant open feeling that is only shaded by a canopy of tall trees. The area of the picnic includes a rich variety of trees species and such as an important part of the restoration that will be featured and interpreted throughout the park. New plantings in the area could be used to create a permanent demonstration area that will be used by a Master Garden program. Drawings of a variety of shrubs and plants are shown to illustrate the future plans for the park. This area is for family and group picnicking - a quiet activity that will benefit from the shade. Various paths were through this area to protect tree roots from compaction, and connect to the interpretive spine and two restrooms. Facilities for up to 250 are provided with tables, Benches and play tables.

**DESIGN CONTEXT STATEMENT**

The park master plan shows improvements that can accommodate a broad range of programs and uses. The goal of the plan is to interpret the historic nursery and add new facilities that will offer new compatible programs in the park. Rows of evergreen and deciduous trees will be introduced to reflect the rows of trees that were lined up in the nursery for generations. These dominant bands introduce order and rhythm and define outdoor spaces. Care has been taken throughout the park to minimize impacts to existing trees that will remain and be featured.

The historic buildings will be retained and restored to the period of significance (1933 - 1960) except for the Garden Store which is in very poor condition and will be demolished. One currently missing historic structure will be reconstructed - the ball water tank. A second missing historic structure - the ball water tank - will be interpreted in metal and may be built over the main parking lot off Nursery Avenue or in another location. The feasibility of reopening the arches of the Office Building may be considered. Five new buildings will be built to accommodate new program elements. These include an 18,000 square foot Interpretive/Education Center, information and visitor building, a multi-purpose/classroom building, a restroom, and a combination restroom/kitchen near the office building. The lower portion of the reconstructed water tower may be enclosed to serve as an office for the City. An existing nursery shed will become the primary interpretive spine. Many of the other park features connect to this spine.

**INTERPRETIVE CENTER**

A new, single story 10,000 square foot, or two-story 18,000 square foot interpretive/education center will focus historic artifacts and exhibit telling the story of the founding family, the California Nursery and the City of Fremont's role in California's rich agricultural heritage. On the west side of the center, wide stone walkways at either side of ornamental planting beds and framed by hedges form a grand entrance to the center and interpretive elements of the historic nursery. These beds will be an artistic interpretive display of the character of the nursery. The space could be expanded off to create another event venue. Pathways and planting of the center connect to the complex of buildings and outdoor spaces on the east side of the center. These connectors provide flexibility for outdoor events of varying size. A temporary plaza may be constructed where the stone walkway meets Nursery Avenue. It will serve as a gathering area and include signs that depict the future plans for the park. Optionally, the location of the Interpretive/Education Center may be considered for the area south of the main parking lot and would be laid out to avoid conflicts with historic trees.

**VALLEJO ADOBE**

The Vallejo Adobe lies at the center of the park. The existing fence will be removed and replaced with a low fence and taller plants. The garden will be interpreted to more accurately reflect California's garden. The non-historic restroom building adjacent to the adobe will be retained with shrubs. The storage space and restrooms will be upgraded and possibly enlarged.

**ARBORETUM WAY - INTERPRETIVE PROGRAM**

Many of the park facilities are connected to an interpretive spine that follows the alignment of an early circulation road in the nursery. It will be anchored at one end by the President's House and at the south with a plant and metal table. Interpretive material telling the history of the nursery and gardens will be displayed at each end and along the spine. Another paved gathering area at the end point features the tree water table. Multiple pedestrian paths connect the other features in the park to the spine.

**BOWD TREE FOREST & RESTROOM**

The Bowd Tree Forest is left much as it is currently. The existing board live oak trees and double row of pines will be retained and trees that have fallen will be replaced. The informal footpath through this area remains and will be surfaced with decomposed granite. This area is a space for walking in the dense shade, for picnics and could be reworked for a "white tablecloth" food tasting gathering. A new restroom building is shown nearby to accommodate these uses. This building is also equipped with sufficient power to permit food trucks to be located here on occasion.

**NILES BOULEVARD IMPROVEMENTS**

Under a separate contract, Niles Boulevard and the intersection at Nursery Avenue will be improved. As part of that work, 37 new diagonal parking spaces will be created along the north property line of the park. These spaces are included in the 218 count needed for the park.

**NORTHEAST CORNER - SECONDARY ENTRY**

Additional parking is shown along the east property line - between the historic parking planted by John Rock. Additional paths will be planted to minimize this feature. This area will accommodate 51 standard plus 3 accessible parking spaces and can be accessed from the secondary entry gate.

**COMMUNITY GARDEN**

The community garden is located in the northeast corner adjacent to main parking along the east property line. The garden will be fenced and visible from Niles Boulevard. A row of trees will provide a buffer between the garden and street. Alternatively, this area could provide space for a 14 to 2000 boutique nursery.

**PRESIDENT'S HOUSE - PACKING COMPLEX**

Two of the oldest and most important historic buildings on the property are the President's House and the Packing Shed. Both will be retained and rehabilitated. The master plan proposes to add a third, new building to this complex, near the Packing Shed. It will contain a bathroom and enough power and outdoor space for a warming kitchen. The new building is located beyond the safety zone defined by a built line in the northeast corner of the site. The new building is intended to be a multi-purpose space. It can be used as a classroom for students on field trips used for an adult education program. A terrace will provide a flexible outdoor venue associated with the classroom building.

The President's House and garden will be used as a rentable event space. The garden will be interpreted on the side of the home and will feature shrubs and perennials from the historic period. The Packing Shed will remain in its original character and will be used to house the historic picnic tables and other materials used at the California Nursery.

The open space enclosed between the President's House, the Packing Shed and historic outbuildings will be used as an outdoor area for events taking place in these buildings. Small events could be focused in one building and large events could use both buildings plus the central space defined by them. The location of the multi-purpose classroom may be adjusted to minimize impacts to row hedges.

**WATER TOWERS**

The existing water tower base will be stabilized and a replacement water tank added. The second, high water tower and tank will be reconstructed based on available historic documents. The base of the new structure will be constructed to create a one or two story office or storage facility for the City. This iconic element could affect views from the top overlooking the park and environs.

**LONG MEADOW**

An open area adjacent to a row between the Packing Shed and historic outbuildings in the southeast corner of the park. This is a fee-free space that could be used for informal gatherings associated with other park activities, or for the community garden.

**ROOFTOP FAMILY HOME**

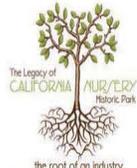
The city will acquire this property in the future and incorporate it into the park. The house and property will be used to interpret the founding family history in relation to the California Nursery and other park purposes. The property includes driveway access to Hillview Drive and a connection to the new parking.

**ORCHARD PERGOLA**

A gracefully curving path and vine-covered pergola will be built in the orchard. This 210-foot long structure with stone columns and stone metal trellis structure will be constructed to reflect the historic nursery and engage modern elements. Its sculptural form will be open - inviting visitors to walk into and through the orchard - the trees and structure woven together. A 90-foot long walkway will cross the walkway at the terminus of the structure creating another space within the park where small groups may gather. Also, a 15-foot diameter paved circle of stone, located beneath the canopy of mature trees, can be used for weddings or large group activities.

**HISTORIC ORCHARD & CALIFORNIA NURSERY ARCHIVE BUILDING**

The historic orchard in the southeast corner of the site will be expanded and will provide a buffer between new park activities and the adjacent residences. The California Nursery Archive Building (previously known as the KOP building) will be converted to an archive for historic material and will be temperature controlled. A glass and veranda will be built on three sides. The space east of the building will provide a venue for small events like lectures or a gathering place for garden tours. A historic relocated bank-house may be brought to the park and integrated into the plan.



**CALIFORNIA NURSERY HISTORICAL PARK MASTER PLAN**

SEPTEMBER 29, 2017

# MAY 24, 2021, MEETING

## Will be on Zoom starting at 7:00 P.M.:

### <https://us04web.zoom.us/j/76473734687>

This meeting will start at 7:00 pm, you can log in about 15 minutes early to check your connection.

#### NEW MEMBERSHIP DUES FOR SINGLE ADDRESS

ONE-YEAR \$10      FIVE-YEAR \$40      TEN-YEAR \$70      PATRON: \$50.00 for one year

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

MAIL CHECK TO: Washington Township Historical Society      PO BOX 3045      FREMONT, CA 94539

