

# Livermore Heritage Guild

*"Help Save Yesterday For Tomorrow"*



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## Building a Library: The story of Livermore's first libraries

A library where one can borrow books and read periodicals is not a recent sign of culture in Livermore; the community has had the benefit of a library since 1875. The citizens of the town at its founding in the early 1870s were both a socially and culturally diverse population. Socially it attracted those who supported four or five fraternal organizations, two fire companies, and a town band. And culturally, it ranged from those who preferred a quiet escape into a Victorian novel to those who supported one of the town's 13 saloons.

In April 1875, the Livermore Library and Dramatic Association organized a library whose holdings were kept at Cross's Jewelry Store at First and Lizzie (now Livermore Avenue) Streets. A family membership cost \$3 annually, or for \$20 one could have a life membership. The local paper reported that there were 250 volumes available with another 75 on order. In December of that year, the library was moved across the street to George Freeman's furniture store in the IOOF building on First Street.

Three years later, in 1878, a successor organization known as the Livermore Public Library Association erected its own building (still standing at 2136 First Street). In 1881, the Association was in a perilous state and issued an anxious call for new members. It even offered a "life membership that would entitle the holder and family to all the privileges of the

Association during the term of his or her natural life." But by 1887 public interest had diminished to such an extent that the Library closed, and the books were stored in the local newspaper office. In its 12 years, the library had never acquired a permanent librarian.

In 1896, the women of the town organized themselves into a Ladies League of Progress of Livermore. Their first order of business was to re-open a public library. Within eight months, the group had formed a public corporation to finance library acquisitions and pay the bills, purchased the old library building and pulled the books out of storage, and selected a full-time librarian. On October 15, 1896, the Livermore Free Public Library opened its doors.

A year later, the Library Board reported that there were 3,500 books on the shelves, and in cooperation with the local paper, it published a "wants" list of new books. The reading room was supplied with 36 newspapers from around the state, donated by their publishers. The local drugstore donated day-old copies of the San Francisco papers.

The Ladies League next lobbied the Town Trustees to consider a tax levy for library support. In September 1901, Livermore became the first town in California to take advantage of new legislation that permitted the establishment of a free public library under

*Continued on Page 3*



October 28, 2006

Dear Members,

In the past two or three years, the Livermore Heritage Guild has come into the 21st century. While we have been in existence for 33 years, we have now made a big jump forward. A new surge of preservation of history is on the rise in the Tri-Valley and the Livermore Heritage Guild is in the middle of it all. We have new projects that have thrown us into the forefront of the City of Livermore, the Planning Commission, the Historic Preservation Commission, and LARPD. Therefore, we are in the BIG league of things now.

Under Larry Mauch's plan we have been moving forward to become a certified museum. Don Meeker has spearheaded the transformation by working with the Museum Assessment Program and other agencies to get us there. A few things we have done towards that goal include sorting and cataloging our materials (always on-going), acquiring new equipment to help us do the work, and installing new software on our computer.

For the past two months new and renewed memberships have been coming in at a record pace. Many of you have included extra donations and upgraded your memberships. This support for the Guild is greatly appreciated; thank you! Also, a thank you to those who have sent donations in memory of long-time Guild supporters Earl Duarte and Barbara Groth.

All of this is wonderful - BUT - the LHG Board and committee chairs cannot continue to carry the entire load of jobs for the Guild. The theme for my presidency is: "Be a volunteer with the Livermore Heritage Guild; let's make it happen." Let's make it happen that we get our members to volunteer and help us with the projects. I truly believe this needs to be our priority for the next year (at least). I suggest the first step is that the Board and committee chairs contact ALL members who have checked off a box on their membership application indicating their desire to help. If we don't make the phone call to them, how will they know we need them?

With ALL of you helping we can "HELP SAVE YESTERDAY FOR TOMORROW."

I look forward to serving the LHG Board and membership, thank you.

*Jolene Abrahams*

President

Livermore Heritage Guild

municipal control and support.

Now, serious discussions were opened in 1908 with the Carnegie Foundation for a library building grant. One condition of a \$10,000 grant was that the beneficiary provide the land on which the library would stand. After consideration of several sites, the Town Trustees proposed to acquire the block at Third and J streets for \$9,000 and, at the same time, mitigate a nuisance – the site was then occupied by a slaughterhouse.

The grant request and the land acquisition were successful. Contracts were let to construct a library building, which officially opened in May 1911. That summer, the Livermore Women's Improvement Club helped finance the landscaping, plant trees, and finish and furnish the basement rooms. The Carnegie Library building was in use for more than 50 years, until the new Civic Center Library opened in 1966. The venerable old building now houses the Livermore Heritage Guild History Center and the Livermore Art Association gallery.

Note: In 2004, the City of Livermore opened the new \$20 million main library at 1188 South Livermore Ave.

- By Gary Drummond

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## **From the Collections Manager**

Recently the Heritage Guild was given a collection of sad irons and antique lanterns by Lloyd Davidson. If you came by the Carnegie Building in the last month or so, you saw many of

them on display.

Until we received this collection, I had never heard the term "sad irons." So I did a little research and came up with some information.

The following, found on the Library of Congress internet site, is copied directly from the transcript of *The History of Household Technology*, a video presentation by Constance Carter. Her presentation related to the differences between nineteenth- and twentieth-century homemaking.

Women of the time undoubtedly would have been using a "sad iron" to press their families' clothes. One meaning of sad in nineteenth-century dictionaries was "heavy." Although many of these irons were small, they were very heavy. When sad irons were heated near an open fire or on the stove, their handles became red hot. Women tried wrapping aprons or towels around the handles, but still burned their fingers. Mary F. Potts endeared herself to countless women when she patented a much lighter sad iron with a detachable wooden handle.

As technology advanced, irons fueled by charcoal, gas, and alcohol became available. Brass hot-box irons were fueled by charcoal, which was placed in the body of the iron and lit. The burning charcoal heated the iron. This iron has a small tank for white gasoline. A valve at the base of the iron regulated the amount of fuel fed to the burner. It's hard to imagine ironing with a burning flame inside an iron, but these liquid fuel irons were sold to rural families well into the twentieth

century. The liquid fuel sometimes caught on fire, singed the handle, or simply exploded. This iron has a pipe that was attached to the gas line in the home and lit with a match, much like a gas stove. Dangerous as they were, gas irons had a continuous supply of fuel, were light, and maintained a more even temperature than the old sad irons.

As a footnote to the above, I found that U.S. Patent 113,448, April 4, 1871, for a sad iron, was granted to Mary Florence Potts of Ottumwa, Iowa. A description of the patent indicates that the invention has a detachable handle for pressing irons. This allowed one to heat several iron bodies and attach the handle to one iron, use it until it cooled, and then attach the handle to another hot iron body.

My next project will be to catalog and photograph our collection of these irons. I will be calling for one or two volunteers to help me with this project. The main project for your Collections Manager is to continue to locate our holdings, most of which have been cataloged. We can always use help in sorting and identifying new material.

If you are interested in participating, please call me at 447-9386.

- By David Abrahams

## Curator's Corner - News from the History Center

What is a curator? From Wikipedia, the free internet encyclopedia.

A **curator** of a cultural heritage institution (e.g. archive, gallery, library, museum, or garden) is a person who cares for the institution's collections. The object of a curator's concern necessarily involves tangible objects of some sort, whether it be *inter alia* artwork, collectibles, or historic items. The role of the curator will encompass: collecting objects; making provision for the effective preservation, conservation, interpretation, documentation, research and display of the collection; and making them accessible to the public.

In the Livermore History Center the job of the curator is reflected in LHG's motto, "Help save yesterday for tomorrow." Being Curator is 'on the job' training for me as my background is in chemistry. I recently retired and said I would 'give it a whirl.'

**Collections at the Carnegie Building-** Recent donations include boxes of memorabilia from Barry Schrader; items from the Hagemann Ranch via the Museum on Main in Pleasanton; an occasional photograph; and a wooden clothes hanger from Arroyo Cleaners & Dyers, which started business in 1938 at 1220 Main Street, the informal name for First Street.

Sales of our new publication, *Early Livermore*, are brisk, and enthusiasts are asking for the next book, which will cover WW II to the present. If you have any photographs from that time period that

you wish to share, let us know. If you're not ready to part with the photos, we can scan them and return the original to you. We'll give you credit in any publications.

**Research requests-** We get requests regularly for information about Livermore and its residents from genealogists, schools, businesses, railroads, etc. Some of these are easy to answer, some more time consuming. If you like detective work, are real good at



the board game *Clue*, and a big fan of *Colombo*, then you'll enjoy treasure hunting for information at the Guild's History Center. Come on down; help us with the hunt!

The History Center received an email from LARPD requesting someone to give a talk on haunted places and ghosts in Livermore. I answered the email saying I didn't know any haunted places or ghost stories about Livermore but I could talk about what happened in Livermore at Halloween according to the papers.

Briefly, this is what I found. Halloween dates back to the Celts in what is now the British Isles. The Irish fleeing the potato famine brought those traditions to America in the 1840s. I looked at

the Livermore Herald from 1900 to 1933 and found Pranks, Dances, Parties, and Advertisements.

Some years there were more pranks than others. The Authorities always tried to keep groups of boys moving; no loitering! Citizens and police turned a blind eye to the pranks as long there was no destruction of property. Trick or Treating and costumes for the kiddies seemed to show up in the 1930s. If you know of hauntings in Livermore or have Halloween stories, I'd love to hear from you.

**History Talk-** In December, I will present our monthly History Talk with "Old Words 101." As I read the papers, Town of Trustees minutes, and Livermore Ordinances I run across words that I've only read in books. Words such as "Menagerie," "Fish Peddler," and "Necromancer," for example, are names of businesses that required a license. I thought a "calaboose" was some ancient, made-up word. It's not! It's a real word used in the Trustee minutes for what we now call a jail. How do we know that Livermore had a shooting gallery? An ordinance was enacted to collect a business license fee from Shooting galleries. Opium Dens in Livermore? You betcha! At least a law was passed against them.

Hope to see you all at the talk. Check out the Calendar on Page 7 for date and time.

- By Don Meeker

## Chinese workers display to open in November

Soon to be completed is an exhibit about the historical dig at the former site of the Chinese workers' compound south of the old Fuse Works/Coast Mfg. and Supply Company.

Two years ago, volunteers, mostly Guild members and seven students, worked with Basic Research to do an archaeological dig south of the Hexel Plant south of Trevarno Road. From 1913 until 1926, up to 22 Chinese men worked at Coast Mfg. and Supply. Most were recruited in China; a few moved to Livermore from the Oakland plant where Coast had been for 45 years.

Although it was known that bottle collectors and children had dug the site over the years, it was not known until well into the dig that bottle diggers had gone down 12 feet! Concerned parents called the city and the hole was filled and capped with concrete.

Even though most artifacts had been broken, there were some whole ones. From the many shards, we know the workers drank Japanese beer and had many attractive dishes and soy sauce and rice wine jugs from China. There

were also many shards of wine and champagne bottles. The Guild team also discovered the remains of shoes. Some had certainly belonged to the Chinese workers; a few were found that may have belonged to ranchers who worked the land before it was purchased by Coast Mfg.

*Right: LHG volunteer Marie Abbott helps with the Chinese workers' compound dig on Trevarno Road.*

*Below: Objects found during the dig. Volunteers found many shards and a*

men. There are also more ledgers at the Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley. Armed with workers' names, a researcher might find



their records or even their pictures at the Angel Island archives.

Museum on Main, in Pleasanton, has a large exhibit on the Chinese Experience in the Valley. The Heritage Guild joined Museum on Main in mounting this display, which will be up until the Christmas season. Call the Museum on Main at 463-2766 for information.

The Guild is looking for someone willing to do more research on the Chinese workers. A ledger at Museum on Main, in Pleasanton lists some of the names of the

*- By Anna Siig*

## Time to renew memberships

If you haven't already renewed your LHG membership, now's the time. The money we receive from your dues helps fund our projects to "Help save yesterday for tomorrow!" As a special bonus this year, half of your membership dues will be donated to the Midway School Project. The Guild is working with the city, LARPD, and the School district to relocate the school to Livermore to provide a unique learning experience for students. More news will follow in coming newsletters.

Please fill out the membership form at right. Checks should be made payable to: Livermore Heritage Guild (or LHG). Mail your check and the completed form to:

Livermore Heritage Guild  
c/o Membership  
P.O. Box 961  
Livermore, CA 94551

If you would like to participate as a volunteer please check the appropriate box or boxes on your membership form.

Thank you!

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## Local authors book signing

The Livermore Heritage Guild is hosting two book-signing events for local authors at the Carnegie Building in November. Both events will take place from 11am to 1 pm.

## Membership Application

Membership from October 2006 through September 2007

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zipcode \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

New       Renewal

<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$15	<input type="checkbox"/> Sponsor	\$50
<input type="checkbox"/> Family	\$20	<input type="checkbox"/> Patron	\$100
<input type="checkbox"/> Senior (62 and up)	\$10	<input type="checkbox"/> Life Member	\$300
<input type="checkbox"/> Youth (under 18)	\$10		

I would like to help out with:

<input type="checkbox"/> History Center	<input type="checkbox"/> Docent
<input type="checkbox"/> Annual Auction	<input type="checkbox"/> History Mobile
<input type="checkbox"/> Duarte Garage	<input type="checkbox"/> Oral history project
<input type="checkbox"/> Publicity	<input type="checkbox"/> Handyman work
<input type="checkbox"/> Historic Preservation Awards	

Make checks payable to: Livermore Heritage Guild (or LHG) and mail to:  
Livermore Heritage Guild, P.O. Box 961, Livermore CA 94551

### Saturday, November 11

Anne Homan: *The Morning Side of Mount Diablo*

Gary Drummond and Anna Siig *The Klondike News*

Gary Drummond: *The Chinese Experience* and *The Vintner's Tale*

### Saturday, November 18th

Jim Concannon: *Concannon*

John Shirley: *I Remember*

All of the books will be available for purchase at the events. The Heritage Guild's newest book, *Early Livermore*, will also be available.



### Duarte Garage featured

The Heritage Guild's Duarte Garage was featured in the October issue of the Lincoln Highway Association, California Chapter's newsletter "The Traveler." The article includes several photos of the Garage and notes that F.H. Duarte built it in 1915. The Lincoln Highway Association's California Chapter stops for lunch at the Garage each April on their annual tour of the 1915 route to San Francisco. Also in the issue is a photo of Jerry Bireley's restored Vernloyd Service Station, opened in May 1933, which is one mile west of the Duarte Garage on P Portola just west of P Streets. "The Traveler" is available at [www.lincolnhighwayassoc.org/ca](http://www.lincolnhighwayassoc.org/ca).

## Calendar

**LHG Board Meeting**, Wednesday, November 1, 7 pm. Carnegie Building, downstairs.

**History Talk**, Wednesday, November 8, 7:30 pm. Silent film venue, "Bronco Billy" starring George Anderson, who was one of the partners of the Niles film production company Essanay. Essanay filmed five Charley Chaplin films while at Niles circa 1915. Chaplin was in Niles for only a few months before moving on to Hollywood. Livermore Civic Center Library. \$2 suggested donation. Light refreshments provided.

**Book signing**, Saturdays, November 11 and 18, 11-1 pm at the Carnegie Building. See article on Page 6.

**Duarte Garage Open**, Sunday, November 12, 10-2 pm. Corner of Portola and L Streets.

**Lincoln Highway Talk**, Sunday, December 3, 2 pm. Free talk and slide show by the author of a new book on the California section of The Lincoln Highway, Livermore Public Library.

**LHG Board Meeting**, Wednesday, December 6, 7 pm. Carnegie Building, downstairs.

**Duarte Garage Open**, Sunday December 10, 10-2 pm. Corner of Portola and L Streets.

**History Talk**, Wednesday, December 13, 7:30 pm. History Center Curator Don Meeker will talk about "Old Words 101: 'Menagerie' and other words from the past." Check out his Curator Corner article on Page 4 for more information. Livermore Civic Center Library. \$2 suggested donation. Light refreshments provided.

**Newsletter mailing**, Saturday, December 23, 11:30, Carnegie Building. Please come and help get the newsletter ready for mailing and meet LHG friends.

**LHG Board Meeting**, Wednesday, January 3, 7 pm. Carnegie Building, downstairs.

**History Talk**, Wednesday, January 10, 7:30 pm. Jack London will be the topic of the January talk. Livermore Civic Center Library. \$2 suggested donation. Light refreshments provided.

**Duarte Garage Open**, Sunday, January 17, 10-2 pm. Corner of Portola and L Streets.

## New Members

The LHG warmly welcomes the following new member:

Betty Banke  
Lydia Carpenter  
Ruth Cohen  
Ruth Dennis-Collins  
Jim and Helen Concannon  
Michael Farrell  
Kim Fox  
Reggie and Jessie Gaylord  
Ann Giannini  
James Hanlon  
Wendy Howe  
Gregg and Rachelle Jeppson  
James Lima  
Ron and Marge Murray  
Milo Nordyke  
Johnnie Painter  
Matt Schellenberg  
Joan Stewart  
William & Audrey Sherwood  
Mr. and Mrs. H. Street  
John R. Stroud  
Tom and Donna Taylor.

## Contact Us

### President

Jolene Abrahams  
925-447-9386

### 1st Vice President (Program Chair)

Vacant

### 2nd VP (Membership Chair)

Jolene Abrahams (acting)  
925-447-9386

### Secretary

Gloria Parra  
925-456-7733

### Treasurer

Dick Lerche  
925-447-9365

### Curator History Center

Don Meeker  
925-447-0472

### Curator Duarte Garage

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*The Livermore Heritage Guild newsletter is published six times per year. Contact the newsletter editor with comments or suggestions for articles.*

*Livermore Heritage Guild  
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**Can you help?** A researcher is looking for information on The Hungry Truck, a restaurant located on Highway 50 (now 580) near Vasco Road in the 1950s and 1960s. We don't have anything; do you? If you have pictures, documents, or information, please call Garage Curator, Bill Junk, at 447-4561.

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**Masthead photo:** Undated photo of the Carnegie Building during the time it was used as the Livermore Library.

## Yes, there will be an auction!

Can you believe it? There will be another Livermore Heritage Guild Auction after all. Brave? Crazy? A bit of both, we think. Bill Junk, 447-4561, or Anna Siig, 447-5475, will pick up most contributions for the auction. The collected items are sorted and, if there are some we feel may not fit the auction, they are donated to a thrift shop. We are unable to take couches, unless antique or vintage. We also will pass on large pieces of furniture, unless vintage or antique. We do take many modern items and LOVE vintage, collectible, and antique items. We already have a small, porcelain antique piece and some vintage pieces.

We will need many volunteers to help with picking up items, sorting them, and putting together box lots. During the week before the auction, we need help with preparations. On the night of the auction, the Saturday of Memorial Day weekend, even more volunteers are wanted to help with the dinner, selling tickets, collecting money, displaying items, and much more. To volunteer, call Jolene or David Abrahams at 447-9386.

Hope to hear from you! Pass the word to neighbors and friends.

*Bill and Anna*

## Calendar available in November

The Guild's annual calendar will be here in the first part of November. The calendar features historical photographs of the Livermore area from LHG collections. They will be available for sale at the History Center in the Carnegie Building, Third and J Streets in Livermore. The History Center is open from 11:30 to 4 pm Wednesday through Sunday. Be sure to get your copy.

