



# Livermore Heritage Guild



*Saving Yesterday For Tomorrow*

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## "Noachian" California Flood of 1862 - 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

The greatest series of storms in California's recorded history began 150 years ago this month, causing widespread flooding. A severe drought followed in 1863-64. These twin phenomena drastically altered livelihoods in the Livermore/Amador Valley and re-shaped local history.

Referred to as the "Noachian deluge" in some sources (after the Biblical story of Noah and the worldwide flood after a rain of 40 days and 40 nights), major rainfall occurred in December 1861 and January 1862 along the Pacific coast from western Canada to Baja California. The Valley then was sparsely populated: mostly stockraisers (rancheros and shepherds), a few grain farmers and men associated with the Corral Hollow coal mine. Neither Laddsville nor Livermore yet existed. Two telegraph lines crossed the Valley. There were no paved roads; the first railroad opened seven years later.

The 1860 census located a mere 514 inhabitants (predominately male; 490 whites, 23 Indians and one "Asiatic") in today's Livermore/Pleasanton/Dublin/Sunol. The nearest newspapers were published in San Leandro, Pacheco and Stockton, so few local accounts of the flood survive.

The January 11, 1862 *Alameda County Gazette* (San Leandro) reported conditions in Amador Valley, "Large tracts of land, intended for cultivation the present year, and partly plowed, has [sic] been entirely overflowed, rendering it unfit for use this season. The country beyond [east of]



Until the 1880s, wetlands covered much of modern-day Pleasanton. Alternatively called the "Bolsa," "Laguna" (lagoon), "Tulare Lake," "Swamp" and "Willow Marsh," the wetlands were the defining natural feature of the Amador Valley floor at the time of the 1862 flood. Today's I-580 is at top, Foothill Rd. at left and Santa Rita Rd. at right (1874 Official County Map).

Dougherty's [today's Dublin], and south of the Stockton road [today's Dublin Blvd./I-580], presents one solid sheet of water. The water is up to the third board on Martin's fence *Continued on p. 4*

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The Livermore Heritage Guild, and family and friends near and far, lost a kind soul this month. Our world is a better place for the time that Lynn Owens spent in it. We will have remembrances of Lynn in the next issue (please submit your favorite memories of Lynn by mail or e-mail to the History Center), but I want to personally note that I will miss his passionate energy, his wisdom, and his friendship. He was an inspirational force. My best wishes to his family, and my wish for that extra bit of strength we will all need with Lynn not among us.

**Summer Yard Sale** With all the content in the last issue, I did not get to mention some of the goings-on that occupied our time over the summer. We had a wonderfully successful yard sale on August 27<sup>th</sup> at the '60's library, the place we fondly call the "Sort 'n Store" where we store our donations for each auction. Over the years we have accumulated a large collection of items that either didn't sell or never made it to auction, so there was a need to clear some space, along with always needing to raise some revenue. To suit those dual purposes, we held a yard sale in the building driveway. Such events are a mixed blessing, in that while you raise money, you also burn a lot of volunteer hours, much of it spent pricing the items to sell. Based on that, and a belief that our customers best know what something is worth to them, we decided to follow the example of Blanche DuBois and "depend[ ] on the kindness of strangers." Nothing in the yard sale had a fixed price and we instead asked that buyers tell us what they were willing to pay. The only rule, often broken, was that nothing was to sell for under a dollar. With that as a baseline, and with frequent reminders that everything they spent went to help our cherished Heritage Guild, our customers stepped up and paid quite fairly for most of the items. As the items cleared out towards noon, we had a Five Dollar Bag sale – anything you could stick in a paper shopping bag was \$5.00. It seems crazy, but we cleared out a lot of plastic figurines, broken costume jewelry and unmatched candle stick holders that way. In the end, even counting the price of the donuts that sustained our volunteers, we cleared about \$900 and a lot of space in our storage area.

**Our Annual General Meeting** The AGM on September 24<sup>th</sup> went wonderfully with live music from Plain Gold Band (Guild members Jessie and Reggie Gaylord), election of Paul Caringal to the Membership and 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President post he has been filling already, and re-election of Susan Junk to the Secretary role. As always, our AGM featured a delicious dinner with wine and dessert. Those of you wondering who might be the quiet and unfamiliar face at the front table during dinner will be amused to know that it was the leading diva for Livermore Valley Opera's production of "Roméo et Juliette." She came by to listen to the music and nibble dinner, a mere two hours before her opening night performance. To think that I was nervous simply speaking at the AGM...

The headliners for the evening were Will Bolton and Irv Stowers taking us through a collection of pictures showing the restoration work on the Seagrave fire engine. It has been an immense project, soaking up thousands of volunteer hours, lots of money and donations of services and items. Many of you have now seen the Seagrave progress and know how impressive is our collection of Livermore fire engines and assorted apparatus as well as the other charms of the Duarte Garage. I would love to be able to share that with more visitors, and all we need are a few more volunteers willing to open the garage one or two more days in the month. We currently do just one day a month and often get requests for more. Interested in being a garage docent? Let Bill Junk or me know and we'll open those doors a little more often.

A little side note on the same day as our AGM. Turns out that exactly 100 years ago there was a motorcycle rally from Oakland to the Livermore flagpole, which had been standing a mere six years at the time. At the end of the event, there was a panoramic photo taken of the finishers using a complex Cirkut panorama camera, many hundreds of motorcycles and their riders, in a single shot that is about three feet wide and represents about a 270 degree view of the assembled masses around the pole. So for the centennial, Bill Mentz of Tri-Valley Moto in north Livermore and owner of the photo,



**Lucy Kortum of Petaluma, an expert on California Carnegie libraries, spoke at the Carnegie Centennial Reception on Oct. 9th.**



called for volunteers to bring their bikes to the same spot and recreate the photo. A number of Guild members were there, including your president. We hope to share both photos with you soon. To see the original, you can visit Bill's shop on the north side of I-580 (952 N. Canyon Parkway).

On October 9<sup>th</sup>, we were very lucky to be able to present Lucy Kortum talking about the California Carnegie libraries (such as our own). Lucy did a study of the 140 California Carnegies and told the story of the extraordinarily rich Andrew Carnegie's mission to hand out the majority of his wealth to create libraries across the globe. Lucy's incredible resume not only includes her historical work that resulted, among other things, in getting ten buildings on the National Register of Historic Places, but also covers many years as an environmentalist, working with her husband Bill Kortum to secure public access to California's coastline, then the creation of the California Coastal Trail (which includes a segment called the Kortum Trail).



Photo by Jason Begis

**An image of the 1920 Seagrave fire engine decorated the cake at the Guild's 2011 General Meeting.**

**Shout Out to History Teachers** I want to say "Hi" to two history teachers and their classes. It is always a pleasure to meet teachers who are making history live for their students, and I learned about cool projects these folks are doing. Noah King, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher at Marilyn Avenue School, saw that in our book *Early Livermore* there were historic scenes from our town that he could line up with modern photos and show the historic roots of the town around us today. He created a presentation that displays a historic Livermore scene then fades in the modern view in its place. For students it is a very direct way of seeing that history is right here around us, creating the foundations we walk among today. Our July/August newsletter described a website called Historypin that does something similar, so I should mention that Noah was working on his project before we ever engaged with Historypin, and in some ways his images are easier and clearer to view. We like Historypin as a global resource, of course, but

Noah's work is Livermore-specific and fun to watch.

Then at the Guild yard sale I met Dave McCombs, Granada High School history teacher. He was browsing through our eclectic collection of donated items and found a cache of historic newspapers with headlines from important world events, from World War II, to the Kennedy assassination, to the 1989 earthquake. He had just been talking to his students about W.W. II and thought they would enjoy seeing the news accounts written in the moment. We know that newspapers are great resources and I'm glad that someone will get good use of these.

**Budgeting** Reasonably close to schedule, we created and passed a budget this year. Most of it looks a lot like any other year, but there are a few notable items. For one, we approved, based on significant targeted donations, funding for the full gold leafing on the Seagrave. It does still include some help from the general fund, so donations are still welcome, but we felt we had seen sufficient progress in both the project and in fund raising. The Historymobile also gets

a good budget infusion and committee chair Nancy Mulligan's goal is to have the finished "HM" (or "Historymobile 2.0," as I like to call it) rolled out for students in this school year. If you have some time to help with exhibits, please talk to Nancy. All you need is an interest in instilling an appreciation in our kids for the heritage of their town. Many thanks to Teresa Tran for her hard work as Treasurer this year. Our budget has become rather complex with our many projects and responsibilities as well as the History Center finances, and Teresa is on top of it all. One of the ways our budgeting works is that we have to make guesses about what income we will be working with. Plainly, this means we are already counting on your donations and membership. Each year our members support the Guild's work, so I'll both thank you and remind you again to keep us in mind as you think about your year-end charitable donations.



**Guild Treasurer Teresa Tran delivered a report at the 2011 AGM.**

**Happy Holidays** All this activity brings us skidding into the end of the year, with Thanksgiving reminding us to be thankful for the people in our lives and the good graces of fortune that have given us roots in Livermore. I hope the holiday season finds you in the company of good friends and family, good food and good cheer!

**Jeff Kaskey**

## 1862 Great Flood *(Cont'd from Page 1)*

next to the swamp – inundating nearly one hundred acres of plowed land. Mr. M., we hear, has lost a number of fine hogs by the sudden rise of back water in the swamp.”

The *Contra Costa Gazette* of January 18, 1862 reported on the flood in the San Ramon Valley, "It came suddenly and with scarce any warning, at about three o'clock in the morning ... The District school-house was also carried away. Above and below Alamo the whole valley was one sheet of water, extending from hills to hills. Cattle, hogs and poultry were borne off by the current. One bridge with some 10 head of cattle on it was carried off." Many farmers lost homes, barns, buggies and/or sacks of grain.

Halley's history of Alameda County (1876) says that in 1862, "Amador Valley was one sheet of water." (p. 161.) "Hundreds (of cattle) perished for want of food and shelter, and there were persons known as 'skinners,' who made a business of divesting the dead animals of their hides." (p. 154). Snow remained on the Livermore hills until April.

Thomas Hart's "Half-way House" was a casualty of the 1862 flood, according to the late historian Earle Williams. Then the commercial hub of the Livermore Valley, the roadhouse was located along Arroyo las Positas roughly where today's westbound I-580 Isabel Ave. offramp begins. Williams wrote in *Carrell of Corral Hollow* that it was "almost completely destroyed" by the 1862 flood (p. 143). The Robert Livermore and N.G. Patterson residences, both situated near arroyos, apparently survived the flood.

William H. Brewer traveled throughout the state in 1860-64 as a member of the California Geological Survey party. His detailed letters to his brother have been published in *Up and Down California*. Brewer visited Corral Hollow in October 1861, just before the flood, and returned in June 1862, when he wrote, "All work at the Corral Hollow coal mines has ceased since last fall and only a few men hung around there. A torrent, like a river, had swept down the canyon last winter, destroying the road." Dan Mosier authored the 1983 book *Corral Hollow Coal Mining District*. He said in 2011, "The 1862 flood in Corral Hollow temporarily knocked out the wagon road that was used by the various coal mining companies, but they quickly fixed the road and continued mining and shipping coal until 1870, when the last mine (Commercial mine) shut down."

The flood proved beneficial to some farmers. In 1862, Maas Luders, an ancestor of the Hagemann family, rented farmland between today's Livermore and Pleasanton Page 4.

where Arroyo Mocho spread out. Historian Janet Newton wrote in the 1960s that the flood deposited so much good soil that Luders enjoyed a bumper crop and eventually purchased the land from William Mendenhall. Many farmers and ranchers were delighted that the flood thinned the population of squirrels, inundating their burrows.

Livermore vintner Robert Taylor, co-founder of Retzlaff Vineyards with late wife Gloria, is a historian of the 1862 flood. He co-wrote with brother W. Leonard Taylor "The Great California Flood of 1862," a paper that they presented to the Fortnightly Club of Redlands, California. They credited their reading of Brewer's book in 1966 as sparking their interest. The Taylors identified four contributing factors for the devastation in northern California: (1) record rainfall [24.36" in San Francisco in Jan. 1862; next highest: 15" in Feb. 1998], (2) high population based along streams and rivers, (3) winter snow melt and (4) hydraulic mining. An estimated one-third of the state's taxable property was lost. A giant lake formed in the Central Valley, nearly 250 miles long by 20 miles wide. Sacramento was so ravaged that most of the state government temporarily relocated to San Francisco. Outflow of brown fresh water counteracted the tide at the Golden Gate for a week.

Severe drought followed in 1863-64. Thousands of cattle and sheep perished due to lack of pasturage. William Mendenhall lost about \$40,000 worth of cattle and horses on his 15,000-20,000 acre fenced rangeland in the mountains 12 miles south of today's Livermore. (Wood, p. 941).

Floods had great symbolic importance in California Indian lore. "West-Central California Indian creation narratives commonly begin with a pre-existing supernatural being who, accompanied by various assistant(s), created the earth from a world covered with water," wrote Lowell John Bean in *The Ohlone Past and Present* (p. 143). Local Indians recognized Mt. Diablo as standing above that first flood.

The U.S. Geological Survey's Multi Hazards Demonstration Project has developed a scenario for a massive winter storm ("ARkStorm") striking the western U.S. "The ARkStorm storm is patterned after the 1861-62 historical events but uses modern modeling methods ... The ARkStorm draws heat and moisture from the tropical Pacific, forming a series of Atmospheric Rivers (ARs) that approach the ferocity of hurricanes and then slam into the U.S. West Coast over several weeks," the U.S.G.S. website says. The U.S.G.S. predicts that such a storm would cost \$725 billion today, more than three times the economic damage of a "Big One" earthquake. *-by Jason A. Bezis*

*(A future article will discuss subsequent Livermore Valley floods.)*





## Holiday Gift Ideas: Save 10% at Guild's History Center Store

The Livermore Heritage Guild History Center store is open daily until Christmas Eve, 11:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Come by and do some holiday shopping in a friendly, interesting and calm atmosphere. Guild members receive a 10% discount. (The Livermore Art Association also has many fine items available in the Carnegie Building.)

### LIVERMORE LIGHT BULB 110<sup>TH</sup> YEAR

"A Century of Light" DVD movie. \$18.

**The Firehouse Light**, written by Janet Nolan and illustrated by Marie LaFrance. \$15.99.

**The Little Light Shines Bright** by KPIX-TV's Juliette Goodrich and illustrated by Roseanna Lester is a children's book about Livermore's centennial light bulb. \$12.95.

### CARVED FROM DOWNTOWN FLAGPOLE

The Tri-Valley Wood Carvers have given a "second life" to the 126-foot Douglas fir flagpole that stood at First St. & S. Livermore Ave. from 1905 to 2004. Purchase a "flagpole clock" for \$55.00 or a "flagpole pen" for \$49.00.

### BOOKS ABOUT LOCAL PLACES

**Historic Livermore, California: A-Z** by Anne Homan is the most comprehensive history of the Livermore Valley that has been published. Invaluable reference book. \$34.95.

**History of Tesla: A California Coal Mining Town** by Dan L. Mosier and Earle E. Williams is about the community that was the namesake of Tesla Road. \$29.95.

**Morning Side of Mount Diablo: An Illustrated Account of the San Francisco Bay Area's Historic Morgan Territory Road** by Anne Homan is about the Morgan Territory area north of Livermore. \$28.50.

**Images of America: Early Livermore** is an Arcadia Press book of photos that the Guild composed. \$19.99.

**The Charm of Old Livermore** by the late Janet Newton, illustrated with her watercolor paintings. \$10.00.

**Train of Lights** is a children's book about the Niles Canyon holiday train between Sunol and Niles via the Niles Canyon Railway. \$17.00.

**Grandpa, I Want to Be a Conductor Someday!** is a children's book by Andrew Aiton. \$9.99.

### BOOKS ABOUT LOCAL PEOPLE

**Vasco's Livermore, 1910: Portraits from the Hub Saloon** by Anne Homan and Richard W. Finn. \$15.99.

**The Early Pioneers in the Livermore Valley, California: We're One Big Family** by Isabel Nolte is a genealogical study focusing on early local Irish-American families. \$25.00.

**The Holm Family Cookbook: A Culinary Tale of Danish Tradition and Western Lore in The Golden State of California** by local artist Tilli Calhoun (née Holm) and her family. Their Danish traditions melded with Western life, especially in the kitchen. \$29.95.

**I Remember: Stories of a Combat Infantryman in Italy, France, & Germany in World War II** by Dr. John Shirley of Livermore is about his experiences with the 15<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division, U.S. Army. \$15.



**Stationery Set: Assortment of local scenes sketched by Anna Siig** - \$9.00 for a pack of ten cards & envelopes.

**Klondike News: The Adventures of Livermore Area Residents from 1897 to 1906 During the Alaska Gold Rush**, edited by G. B. Drummond and Anna Siig. \$12.95.

**The Chinese Experience in the Livermore Area** by G.B. Drummond. \$4.60.

**OTHER ITEMS:** The "official coffee mug" of the Heritage Guild. Cobalt blue with white lettering. \$8.50.

"Livermore: The Movie" DVD. \$25.00.

**Assorted cards & gift tags** by Pat Hoenig - original artwork and impressed flowers.

**Stationery depicting local landmarks** by Tilli Calhoun. A great small gift or "stocking stuffer."

## East Ave. School "Stained Glass" Windows: 1970s, '80s Tradition

In the 1970s and '80s, the winter holidays were festively commemorated in the front windows of East Avenue school, 3951 East Avenue.

The stained "glass" panels, which were created out of black butcher paper (art-craft paper) with designs cut through and filled with color tissue paper, were a local staple of the Christmas holiday season. The owner of the Shell service station on the corner of East and Hayes Aves. generously paid the utility bill for the school during the two-week recess when the classroom lights were left on to illuminate the windows.

The tradition started when art teacher Pat Kizawa began creating window designs with her art students in 1970. After Ms. Kizawa transferred to Livermore High in 1971, new art teacher Jim Nash continued the holiday window designs tradition. That year the entire school got involved in the project. Homeroom classes held a competition for best designs, with students voting for their favorites.

The *Tri-Valley Herald* of Dec. 22, 1975 recounted the contest among 27 homerooms that year, judged by Principal Charles Lindemann, trustee Ken England and reporter Janet White: "The East Avenue School windows displaying children and elves in home scenes won first place ... Students in Janet Muldoon's and Nina Hughes' homerooms will be treated to a party - the first prize ... Taking second place was the candle scene designed by Carl Sekland's class, third place was the angel created by Lorraine Immel's homeroom. Honorable mentions went to the reindeer and the soldier, hand-crafted by Charlotte Swanson's homeroom."



1978 East Ave. Dolphins Yearbook/Annual (via James Nash)

The entire school created the window designs for several years, but this took too much time away from each teacher's curriculum. Then the staff decided that the art classes would create all the window designs; that worked well for several more years until Mr. Nash and Mrs. Anne Lack (the two art teachers) began teaching CORE classes of English and social studies in addition to art. There just were not enough art classes to continue creating ninety-six individual window designs, so the tradition ended in 1989.

Perhaps the largest audiences for the windows were on the nights of the Winter Band and Orchestra concerts when young musicians from East, Jackson Ave., Arroyo Seco and Christensen schools performed in the gym while their families watched from the bleachers. Bernie Berke (band) and Gerald Stasko (orchestra) conducted. The East band and orchestra also played at the daytime schoolwide assembly. *(Jim Nash, East teacher from 1971-2007, supplied material for this article. If you have any photos or film of the East Ave. school windows, please contact the History Center.)*



## New Livermore Historymobile May Be Rolling by April 2012

The Guild in 1989 acquired its first "Historymobile," a 27-foot motorhome that visited schools and civic events to educate visitors about Livermore history. Barry Schrader and Marilyn "Tilli" Calhoun led that project (as discussed in the May/June 2004 Guild newsletter). After two decades of serving the Guild, the 1969 Pace Arrow is being retired.

The Guild in 2010 accepted donation of a 31-foot, 1984 Barth motorhome to serve as the new Historymobile. Its renovation is being accomplished in earnest. A dedicated committee led by Nancy Mulligan has stripped out the interior and taken off all of the tanks, etc. Mildewed ceilings and walls have been replaced. Wiring is now throughout the RV with plugs behind every display case. The inside has been painted and is looking really great.

The floor will go in next and Tim Sage just received the aluminum pieces to repair the outside. Once that happens, the crew hopes to get the outside painted professionally. Mulligan is looking for local artists who might be interested in doing a mural. Anyone interested can contact her at 443-3076 or n.mulligan@comcast.net and she will send photos, dimensions, etc. The Guild would supply all materials and also offer a small stipend.

Meanwhile, the other members of the Historymobile committee are busy making curtains and posters and collecting artifacts. Tilli Calhoun has graciously allowed use of many wonderful items she had in the old Historymobile. Ken Morgan of the Tri-Valley Wood Carvers Club is making a model of Livermore's famous totem pole. John Bruce has built an old-fashioned school room that will be featured in the Historymobile. Concannon, LARPD and the Liver-

more National Lab have all contributed to the collection. The committee and some volunteers from Home Depot will be making display cabinets and walls for poster displays. The committee hopes to obtain grants to provide some things needed. They are also seeking donations of local artifacts, cash, business materials/services and volunteer time.

"If all goes well, our grand opening will be in April so we can provide Livermore history to our third grade classes in May, 2012," says Mulligan.



**Above:** Historymobile volunteers Dottie Eberly and Anne Anaya. **Missing:** Bonnie Pastrnak, Beth Wilson. **Below left:** The new Historymobile. **Below right:** Dave Taylor, Tim Sage, Nancy Mulligan, Joe Bishop and Jeff Kaskey renovate the interior. **Missing:** Tom Eberly.



# LHG Events Calendar & Notes

**SUNDAY, JANUARY 15<sup>TH</sup>, Duarte Garage Open from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m** on old Lincoln Highway, Portola Ave. at L St. (No "open garage day" in December.)

**Bill Owens: Ordinary Folks Photo Exhibition, San Jose Museum of Art (through Feb. 5, 2012)** The exhibition includes forty photographs from Bill Owens' collection. Owens is a photojournalist who took photos of 'ordinary folks doing ordinary things.' He is known for documenting customs, symbols and social relationships that characterized American middle-class culture in the 1970s, especially in his 1973 book *Suburbia*, which focused on Livermore.

**William M. Mendenhall** (1823-1911), founder of Livermore, died a century ago on November 20, 1911. The townsite was platted on his land in 1869. His residence on College Ave. stood until 1979. A middle school is named for him.

Please submit stories about the late **Lynn Owens** to the History Center for possible use in an upcoming Guild newsletter article about his life.

**Newsletter by E-mail** If you would like to receive this newsletter by e-mail exclusively, please send an e-mail to newsletter editor Jason Bezis at [jbezis@yahoo.com](mailto:jbezis@yahoo.com). You would help to reduce the Guild's printing and postage expenses.

**Membership Dues** Have you paid your Guild membership dues for the 2011-12 year? See your "Paid through" date on the address label below. You may pay by mail or at the History Center. More information is to the left of the label.

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The Livermore Heritage Guild History Center is located in the historic 1911 Carnegie Library building at 2155 Third Street. History Center hours generally are Wednesday through Sunday, 11:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Phone: (925) 449-9927. Free admission.

Annual membership dues are: Individual \$25.00, Family \$35.00, Senior (age 62+) \$15.00, Student \$15.00, Sponsor \$75.00 and Patron \$150.00. Life (Individual) \$500.00 and Business \$300.00 memberships are also available. Please make checks payable to "LHG." Mail to P.O. Box 961, Livermore, CA 94551.

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