

Do You Remember?



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Ferrario Winery Building

Carlo Ferrario was born near the Swiss border in Lonate Pozzolo in the Lombardy region of Italy, in 1878. The *Oakland Tribune's* Knave column in 1934 described him as "well over six feet tall, and broad in proportion." He immigrated to Livermore in 1901 and married Rosa Gardella that same year; their home was at the northwest corner of Third and South K.

He opened a saloon at the southeast corner of Second and South L. He built his first winery on Second Street. He had bought the property, site of the original Livermore firehouse, from the Dania Society trustees in 1911. An old photo shows three separate buildings lined up on Second Street with "Livermore Winery, C. Ferrario" painted on the middle one. Three wagons and a truck are waiting in the street. The old winery site now is the Wells Fargo Bank and its parking lot, between South K and L. After Prohibition was over, Ferrario sold sauterne, burgundy, sherry, and port in bulk at what he then called the Carlo Ferrario Winery. In a 1935 ad, he reminded drive-in

customers to "bring your container."

In 1936 Ferrario built a brick winery building on South Livermore Avenue just outside the city limits at the site of an old slaughterhouse. Gary Drummond wrote that it had "a storage capacity of 500,000 gallons. Initially, Ferrario continued crushing operations of both red and white grapes at the Second Street winery until he could install additional equipment. The new winery eventually handled only red grapes, while the city plant continued with white grape processing. Ferrario absorbed almost all the grape production of small vineyards in the area." His burgundy won a gold medal at the State Fair in Sacramento in 1935. Frank Garbini worked as his winemaker. Carlo Ferrario died in 1952. He had sold the brick winery to the R.C. Williams Company in 1943.

The Williams Company vacated the brick winery building in 1946 and sold the property to the Wente family. It was used as a storage building by both Wente and Concannon and then leased to the Mayflower

moving company. Virginia creeper covered the sides of the old structure. I remember when we first moved here in 1970 that it had the word "Mayflower" on it. In 1993 Our Savior Lutheran Church, which had been in Livermore for 40 years, bought the Ferrario Winery building and surrounding property from the Wentes. The winery building still had Wente wine stored in it at the time. At first, the congregation built a private elementary school, which opened on the site in 1996. After selling their property at East Avenue and Estates Street in 1998, they built a stunning new sanctuary, made of simulated old brick in a color that respected the winery's construction.

On 23 May 1994, the church agreed to preserve the old winery building. In return, the city gave the church an adjoining acre for parking. Permission was given to use the parking lot on the Livermore Area Recreation and Park District's (LARPD) adjoining land. LARPD would continue to maintain the lot.

John Seals, one of the Oakland architects for the project, said that preserving the old winery cost



Carlo Ferrario Winery building, 2006.

much more than razing it and building a new Ministry Center. The project was "a sacrifice and sign of good will toward the community" on the part of the church. The architects hired an innovative engineering company, Degenkolb, to handle the difficulties of earthquake retrofitting the building with steel and creating two stories in the space. One of their recommendations was to tear down the free-standing 22-foot high brick wing wall that continued to the north of the winery. The architects had a number of meetings with the city preservation committee to discuss design. The wall was a sticking point. The wall was the front of a collapsed structure with metal walls that had been built later as a companion next to the 1936 winery. The city wanted to save the remaining brick wall, but the engineers and architects saw it as a haz-

ard. Finally, the question was decided when a wind storm blew it over one night. No one was hurt. The fallen bricks were used in the renovation, which began in 2007 and continued until opening day, 29 May 2008.

Preparing for this column, I enjoyed two tours of the church. One of them was led by the church secretary, Krys Thibault, and the other by their facilities director, Ken Girardin. He showed me the inward-curving semicircle of glass blocks that replaced the large front door but still left the feeling of an entrance. The original concrete impressed with "C. Ferrario 1936" is saved in the floor of the semicircle. The architects replaced the original roof with red metal to match the other buildings on the lot.

The sanctuary has a large cross facing South Livermore Avenue. On either side of it are vertical stripes of a

modified soldier course of bricks that jut out from the surface to give it more texture. This brick pattern is repeated in the panels between the upper and lower windows cut into the winery walls. Inside the winery the old bricks are visible in almost every classroom, office, meeting room, and also along the stairway, giving a sense of being embraced by warm old age. Outside, the shallow arches at the top of the new window treatments at the roof line are repeated in the free-standing entrance and in the trellis next to the small parking lot on the north side of the building. Their landscaping is beautifully done, including white roses and grape vines. On Maunday Thursday, 5 April 2012, the church celebrated communion with wine made from their own grapes for the first time.

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