

2019 NOVEMBER

Independent

MAGAZINE

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DISCOVERING
HAGEMANN RANCH



Colorful Events at Hagemann Ranch Bring Yesterday into Today

By Carol Graham

In the heart of Livermore, is a vision of the city's past.

Hagemann Ranch stretches off Olivina Avenue, offering a glimpse into Livermore's early history through free, family-friendly open houses, seasonal celebrations, activities and programs.

Here, two members of the Livermore Heritage Guild, Barbara Soules and Jeff Kaskey, shed light on a hidden treasure.

What is Hagemann Ranch like?

Soules: Hagemann Ranch is a place where time stood still — from when Livermore was a rural outpost of San Francisco. It is a tranquil oasis, possibly the most peaceful place in the city. Having so many animals onsite adds to the farm atmosphere. At open houses, guests usually stay a long time to enjoy the calm and to participate in the activities. Vendors comment that it is the most relaxing show they do. Kids love playing games in the big backyard. The sound of laughing kids during open house events is wonderful.

Kaskey: We get to share the story of the founding of the ranch, which weaves together with the founding of our town, both being established in 1869 by the Mendenhall brothers. Visitors get a fresh appreciation for the heritage of our area while learning stories of those early days.

Why is it important to preserve and share history?

Soules: It is important not to forget our roots and to realize how the past has shaped the present. Learning about the past gives one a deeper perspective, and hopefully inspires one to be grateful for our forefathers who persevered in a difficult environment to create our city.

Kaskey: We understand and appreciate the things around us more when we learn their stories. A brick is just a brick



An antique tractor is part of the historic farm equipment display at the ranch.



Visitors check out the barn at Hagemann Ranch.

knew this place was here! I drive by here all the time and never saw it."

Kaskey: The most popular question is, "Can I pet the horses?" The answer is yes: gently, one person at a time, and not if your fingers smell like apples. But guests often have millions of questions. They want to know how old the things are (mostly late 1800s to the 1920s), what crops were grown here (at different times, lots of things from grains to grapes, fruit, vegetables, oak trees, roses, peonies and cactus), how soon we'll restore the windmill (hopefully next year), and how long the Hagemanns lived here (over 100 years).

What is your favorite story involving Hagemann Ranch?

Soules: The Mad Hatter Tea Party took place at the ranch in April 2019. This was our most elaborate event to date, and an experiment. We created Wonderland at Hagemann, complete with a rabbit hole, a looking glass gate, life-sized chess, and croquet with flamingo mallets. The Queen of Hearts, Alice, the Mad Hatter

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until its story helps it become an historic artifact from the local brickyard, then we suddenly are learning about early Livermore industry, local geology, and why a local shopping mall is called the Brickyard Mall. With that background, residents develop more appreciation for their town and start looking to learn more stories.

What types of activities take place at Hagemann Ranch?

Soules: We have two non-profit service providers on the ranch: 4-H and Sunflower Hill. They both have active programs operating on the ranch throughout the week. The Heritage Guild has open houses 10 times a year on the last Sunday of each month (except July and December). We also offer community tours and have multiple community service days throughout the year. The Heritage Garden is operated by Heritage Guild volunteers.

During some open house events, Russ Bearrows does blacksmithing demonstrations. He has a full blacksmith shop with all the tools. Iron rods are heated in the forge. Big bellows heat the fire to the right temperature. The red hot rods are then shaped on the anvil with a hammer. Russ creates many decorative pieces and horse-shoes, and demonstrates different

blacksmithing skills and techniques. Guests old and young are mesmerized with the process and the shop. Explaining that horses have shoes is an interesting discussion, especially the part about how they are attached!

What comments do you hear most often from visitors?

Soules: The most common is, "I never



Blacksmith demonstrations draw great interest.



The 2019 Holiday Celebration on Sunday, Nov. 24, will feature music, dancing, visits with Santa, an artists' boutique, and a Festival of Lights demonstration.

and Mother Goose all attended. The tea party, with real china, was served in the front yard in the mushroom forest. We will repeat this event in 2020.

Kaskey: In the process of restoring the site, people have dropped in to let us know they have historic artifacts that might be appropriate, and sometimes that the artifact originally came from the site. Those are nice stories, but sometimes hard to substantiate. So when a guest who was part of one of my tour groups said he had a drill press that might have come from the blacksmith shop, I was interested, but didn't get around to following up right away. When I finally connected with him and loaded it into my pickup, I was pleased that it looked like a decent example of an historic post drill. I went to mount the drill and realized that the bolts in

the wood lined up perfectly with holes in the post drill, and other wear marks confirmed that at some point very long ago, that exact post drill had been installed in exactly the spot I was returning it to. That sort of "find" gives goosebumps as you restore a small piece of the history of the site.

What would you most like readers to know?

Soules: We always need volunteers, especially people who like to garden. Mrs. Hagemann had a beautiful perennial garden around the house, and we need help preserving it. There are many other areas in which to volunteer, if gardening isn't their forte.

Kaskey: Volunteers are great, of course, and I also want to encourage residents to swing by as guests to experience the site. And visitors are constantly teaching us things – from the curious kids who ask questions that no adult has asked and leave us stumped ("What does THIS do?"), to adults who remember some detail of life that is echoed at our site, or even have a story about their experience on the site or with its residents. Also, we recently have been exploring the unique architecture of the historic buildings on the site. In particular, the house is sort of our own Winchester Mystery House, with rooms and doorways added at



Sunflowers – symbolizing adoration, loyalty and longevity – are one of the many types of flowers, fruits and vegetables grown at Hagemann Ranch.



A teen makes a fowl new friend at the ranch.

random times, so restoration work is always interesting. I tell people, as they stand at one end of the farm lane, that the view down the lane today is very much like the view they would have seen in 1900.

What do you hope visitors take away?

Soules: I'd like them to appreciate that the ranch is a working ranch, with nonprofit groups participating in the upkeep and preservation of the site as well as operating their particular programs. I hope visitors learn about what life was like for Livermore residents at the turn of the last century, through the opportunity to experience some of the daily chores and crafts

of that era. Last month we had kids do laundry on a washboard and create objects with a leather worker. I hope visitors absorb some of the history of this National Historic Site and realize that Martin Mendenhall, the brother of Livermore's founder, William Mendenhall, started this ranch and built most of the buildings. It is the last remaining 4.5 acres of a Spanish land grant continuously used as a ranch.

Kaskey: Because Martin established the site to raise racehorses, visitors learn that the early days of Livermore were not just rough survival, but filled with interesting people who had engaging interests and a great sense of adventure. Visitors typically stay longer than they thought and leave more inspired than they expected.

To learn more or sign up for the Hagemann Ranch e-letter, visit www.lhg.org, or search Hagemann Ranch on Facebook. Hagemann Ranch is located at 455 Olivina Ave., Livermore. ■