



LIVERMORE HERITAGE GUILD

"Help save yesterday for tomorrow"

HISTORY OF VETERANS PARK

In 1874 the land belonged to Dolores H. Mesa. Her son, Ysidro Mesa, owned the Dos Mesas vineyard and the winery on the hill above the picnic grounds. It was Dolores Mesa who sold land to Charles Wetmore for his vineyard and winery.

In 1889 the land where the park is now located belonged to Frank L. Fowler, a handsome young bachelor from Kentucky who was a protégé of Charles Wetmore. On an 1889 panoramic map of Livermore, the vineyard is marked "F.L.Fowler's High Type Vineyard". It is recorded that Fowler kept his cottage fairly smothered in flowers.

Maitland R. Henry, former owner and editor of the Livermore Herald and one of Livermore's greatest historians, wrote in a letter dated Feb. 17, 1963: "When I was a boy in the Herald office...Dr. Cross (who at that time owned the Dos Mesas Winery) placed a large order with us for gold-embossed letterheads...I spent a whole summer printing that job...my right arm still feels tired whenever I think of Dr. Cross or Dos Mesas. It was one of Livermore's finest wineries."

Dr. Cross's house is still in the park on the bank above the Arroyo del Valle. It is part of the barbecue and picnic area. The path that leads to it from the low-level bridge is the old road that forded the creek before the Veterans Hospital bridge was built.

Dr. Chesley Bush, the long-time director of the Arroyo del Valle Sanatorium (which was a short distance south of the Veterans Hospital) gave the following account of the choosing of the site for the Veterans Hospital:

"It was a beautiful evening in June, about 1923. The sun was setting, the clouds were pink. The smoke from a train could be seen down in the valley. I got out my old Dodge touring car and went up the hill from the hospital to my home for dinner.

The telephone rang. Central said there was a gentleman asking for Dr. Bush. He had a card of introduction from Mrs. Tate Thompson - the executive secretary of the California Tuberculosis Association. I got in the car again and went to town to see the man. He turned out to be the General Counsel for the Veterans Bureau and his name was Cramer.

Mr. Cramer said he was looking over the northern part of the state for a site for a Veterans Hospital. Mrs. Thompson had told him to see me before leaving. I asked him if he had seen the Cresta Blanca site. Mr. Cramer said no. I then drove him to the site of the present hospital.

It was one of the most beautiful nights in the year. Mr. Cramer looked out over the Valley and exclaimed over its beauty. He

asked whom he should see in connection with the purchase of it. I answered that a Mr. Johnson owned it. Mr. Cramer then departed.

About a week later, Mr. Cramer rang me up to say that all negotiations had been completed for the purchase of the site for a Veterans Tuberculosis Hospital to serve Northern California.

The San Fernando site was chosen a couple of weeks later, to serve the southern part of the state."

Supposing that Dr. Bush had not been at home that lovely summer evening? It seems likely that there would not have been a Livermore Veterans Hospital!

In 1967 the lower part of the site was acquired by the Livermore Area Recreation and Park District and made into "Veterans Park" The park includes the old winery, built against the hill in the upper part of the park and also the extensive wine-storage cave near it.

Janet Newton, 1974

References:

1874 official map of Alameda County (Allardt)

1889 panoramic map of Livermore

Wines and Vines of California by F.E.Wait, 1889