

# Livermore Heritage Guild

*"Help Save Yesterday For Tomorrow"*



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## THE AUTOMOBILE

by Gary Drummond

Little did the people in Murray Township realize what the future might bring when in July, 1899 the Herald reported, "It is rumored that the valley is soon to have an automobile. Mrs. (Phoebe) Hearst is said to have purchased one; if true, ours will be the first rural community in the state to have one of the marvelous vehicles." In September of that year, a local doctor ordered an automobile from the Best Works in San Leandro, who heretofore had primarily manufactured threshing machines. It was the beginning of a social revolution.

In early 1901 a salesman for Locomobile autos came through Livermore on his way to delivering a machine to a Bakersfield customer. It was a magnificent machine – steam-powered, gas-fueled, at the cost of one and a quarter cents a mile, with a double cylinder reversing engine. The salesman "favored a number of local citizens with a spin over the model roads of the valley, and all were delighted by the experience." By the time the salesman departed, H. R. Crane, a local bicycle dealer, had been named Locomobile agent.

But there was a downside to this new innovation. Automobiles never failed to produce panic among wagon and buggy teams. As a remedy, the Automobile Club of California offered a "horse familiarization" course where, by locating one or two automobiles at some convenient

place in the community, horse owners could bring their animals close to a vehicle with its motor running.

Local farmers constantly railed at inconsiderate drivers who failed to slow down when passing a team on the road. A petition, addressed to the County Board of Supervisors, asked that automobiles be banned in Livermore Valley, insisting that "most drivers are of an irresponsible class who have only recently joined the ranks, as they appear to have little knowledge of their machines except to drive them at their full speed." The Board pointed out that automobiles have an equal right to the roadway. The Murray Township Supervisor argued that "automobiles of San Francisco do thousands of dollars of damage to our roads and do not contribute one cent to their support. This problem will never be settled until the State takes over the main highways."

Early day automobile manufacturers multiplied like today's dot.com companies. It was reported that a company had been formed in San Francisco to take over the old Bilz Buggy and Wagon Works in Pleasanton for the manufacture of automobiles. "...the company already has orders for several large machines and (the principals) are confident that the industry will assume large proportions." Nothing more was ever reported about this venture.

Meantime, locals were becoming comfortable with the automobile. In July 1904, Dr. J. K. Warner purchased a 10-horsepower Cadillac automobile. It was said to have

been fitted with the latest improvements “including a powerful searchlight which will be valuable for use on mountain roads at night. The machine is a heavy runabout, but the tonneau cover is so arranged that a second seat and canopy top can be used where needed.” Three months later, Dr. Warner traded the Cadillac in for an Oldsmobile, as “he found it too heavy a machine for his purpose.” H. R. Crane bought Warner’s Cadillac and rented it out for excursions complete with chauffeur.

Crane, the Locomobile agent, took on sales of other automobiles. In 1903, it was the Oldsmobile line; in 1905, the Autocar, Rambler and Pope-Hartford lines, and in 1907 he became the local Ford agent.

Law enforcement was another issue brought about by the automobile. There were outraged citizens in Pleasanton when the town fathers raised the speed limit from 10 to 20 miles per hour within the town limits. The Town Marshal was, however, instructed to see that the ordinance was strictly enforced.

A new State law became a source of some confusion when three local citizens were cited one evening when they left their automobiles standing in front of the Bell Theatre on Livermore’s First Street without their lights on. The confusion: the law used the term “in use”. The law stipulated that automobiles will have two lights in front and one red in back burning from a half hour after sunset until a half hour before dawn when a vehicle was in use. Some drivers interpreted this term to mean only that time when they were actually traveling from place to place. The County District Attorney, however, interpreted the law differently and ruled that a vehicle standing on the street “awaiting the owner’s pleasure was in use”. It cannot be said to be out of use unless housed in a shed or garage. The Legislature clarified the language shortly.

Automobiles had become a common sight on local streets by 1905, and horses no longer shied at them. That same year the first taxi service started up when John Lassen purchased a 10 horsepower Pope-Hartford touring car and proposed to do a general passenger business around Livermore and throughout the valley.

And so it went. Horses became accustomed to passing automobiles; drivers became more or less conscious of traffic regulations; and pedestrians became more adept at avoiding aggressive drivers. The situation hasn’t changed in a hundred years.

## **HERITAGE GUILD HAPPENINGS**

**Its Auction time again! This year will be another fun packed event. We have something for everyone. We hope you will join us for some laughs and fun. This year's proceeds are going towards the purchase of a MicroFilm reader printer for the Carnegie Library.**

## **CALENDAR**

Saturday May 28th

Preview @ 5:00pm, Optional Dinner @ 6:00pm

Auction Starts @ 7:00pm

Thursday, June 2nd @ 7:00 p.m.

LHG Board Meeting, Carnegie Library, downstairs

Thursday, July 7th @ 7:00 p.m.

LHG Board Meeting, Carnegie Library, downstairs

## **Agenda for LHG Sponsored History Talks:**

**All presentations are held 7 to 9 p.m. in the community meeting room of the Livermore Civic Center Library on South Livermore Avenue**

### **June 15, 2005:**

**Anna Siig**, will share and discuss artifacts from the excavation last year at the site of the Chinese community living and working in the early 1900's at fuse works known as Coast Manufacturing, now the Hexel site. It is a chance to learn about a little known but important group of people who were an integral part of Livermore's history.

### **July 29, 2005:**

**John Shirley**, will share a video presentation of his participation in a recreation of "The Fight at Anzio and the Liberation of Rome" during World War II. This is sure to be a very interesting evening.

\$2 suggested donation. Coffee, tea and sweet breads provided by the Library Cafe. The Library Cafe is open until 8:00 p.m. providing sandwiches and drinks.

NOTE: David Heyman is interested in stories about Max Baer Sr & Jr. David's email address is david.heyman@lms.com. If you have an interesting story, drop David an email.

*It's Auction Time Again!*

## *Livermore Heritage Guild Auction*

May 28th at the historic “Duarte Garage”  
Portola Ave. at N. Livermore Ave.  
Livermore, Ca.



*It is time for another fun filled evening of “auction mania” and just plain old fashioned fun!*

This year's auction has something for everyone. We were fortunate to receive a large donation of antiques, including twelve, yes twelve, antique sewing machines. These machines are in various stages of refinishing so the machine's heads are separated from the stands; think of it more as a “do it yourself” kit! The sewing machines include 4 each “White”, 4 each “Singer”, a “New Home”, a “Florence Rotary” and a “New Cottage” model. We have a solid oak table ready to restain, several antique end tables, antique wicker baby cart, (needs new rubber on the rims), a metal table and chairs from the “City of Paris” in San Francisco, (needs some sanding and repaint), an antique scale, antique toasters and iron trivets, antique chair, Birdseye maple desk, antique headboard, “Airline” antique radio, numerous pictures (we only kept the best ones for the auction), Anniversary clock from Germany, WWII army knife, Bee keepers outfit, glassware, tools, toys, match collection, Norditrack Aerobic Cross Trainer, wooden cases for mounting insects, small size Rolltop desk for a hallway or child, telescope, several antique cabinets, etc., etc.

**Auction preview at 5:00pm, optional pasta dinner at 6:00pm (donation of \$8.00 requested. We are limited to 120 dinners so first come, first serve) followed by the auction at 7:00pm.**

## A Brief Word

Last I heard, summer was still scheduled to be here soon! In June, stop by the Carnegie History Center; the new displays will be installed by the middle of June. With the auction and all, we are running a few weeks behind. June also marks the beginning of the History Talks again at the new library. See the schedule and speakers inside this newsletter. Don Meeker will be assuming the Curator's duties at the Carnegie Library while Bill Junk will continue as Curator of the Duarte Garage. Thanks guys for your time and effort. I want to thank Muriel Dean who has been setting up QuickBooks 2005 on our computer to better track the Heritage Guild's finances. Bill Nale has been working feverishly digitizing our photo collection, thanks Bill! Maxine Trost had Robert Livermore's Cattle Brand application restored, after which Maxine matted the document for our display in June, thanks Maxine! Marie Abbott has assumed the role of Publicity Chairperson for the Guild, we appreciate her efforts and enthusiasm. We are installing a highspeed internet connection this month at the Carnegie Library to better facilitate our research capabilities. This years auction proceeds will go toward the purchase of a new microfilm reader/printer for the Carnegie Library, so be sure and attend and bid, bid, bid! HOPE TO SEE YOU ALL THERE! We would like to create a video of Gary Drummond's walking tour of downtown, so if anyone knows of someone with experience that can help, please have them contact me. My email address is larrym49@comcast.net or leave a message at 449-9927.

See you at the auction!  
Larry Mauch

