

Livermore Heritage Guild

Saving Yesterday For Tomorrow



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Army Motor Convoy Re-Visits Livermore: 1919 & 2009

September 5, 1919 was expected to be a gala day in Livermore because the U. S. Army Motor Transport Corps would be in town. A welcoming committee had been organized, the Boy Scouts would meet the convoy at the county line. The convoy entered the town on east First Street, turned onto Junction Avenue, passed the Duarte Garage and continued west on the Dublin Road.

The crowd was disappointed when they learned the convoy could not take time to pause because it was expected to be in Oakland that afternoon. Even so, as the vehicles drove through, the welcoming committee passed out watermelon and grapes to the weary soldiers.

The transcontinental motor convoy was a road test of Army vehicles. Following much of the Lincoln Highway cross-country, it left Washington, D.C. on July 7, and expected to reach San Francisco by Labor Day.

The convoy was made up of 79 vehicles: nine

motorcycles that scouted the route ahead, 37 cargo trucks, 21 special purpose vehicles, three of which were fitted out as machine shops and 12 automobiles. The complement included 39 officers, several of which were observers, and 258 enlisted men, all under the command of Lt. Colonel Charles McClure.

The route west of Illinois was punishing: tires were shredded, ignition systems failed, vehicles slid off the narrow roads into ditches and gullies.

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A Message From the President

September 17, 2009

Dear members,

With summer waning, I hope each of you had an opportunity to do something by which to remember the heat of 2009. I joined Loretta in Rome for a week, and of course used it as a chance to do a little museum and heritage site research. Rome is an extreme example of how history and character can shape a community's identity and impress its visitors. I learned that even amazing, dramatic 2000 year old ruins and sublime sculptures begin to blur in my memory unless there is a story to clarify and distinguish these from those. A knowledgeable guide helped us envision bloodthirsty gladiators beset upon unarmed slaves in the coliseum, a helpful paragraph explained that the sympathetic sculpture of a sleeping woman was attested by the sculptor to be exactly as he saw Saint Cecilia, exhumed 1000 years after her death! Sometimes the locations are inexact, stories are apocryphal or hearsay, but with a guide's vivid interpretation the speculation itself adds drama.

Back home I saw that having historic things is enhanced by the stories that make history live in Livermore. As our crew works to restore the 1920 Seagrave, the stories of firefighters who remember keeping it ready to fight help to inspire our efforts and inform the restoration. Our historic light bulb draws visitors on its own merits, but those guests love to hear of the bulb's glowing travel across town and the years of neglectful bouncing and bumping as it hung anonymously from the firehouse ceiling. Our historic Duarte Garage becomes more vivid for visitors when we explain the operation of a towbar used to haul disabled Model T's in from the muddy, rutted Altamont for yet another tire patch.

In that spirit, I want to share a story that was unearthed with the recent recovery of the Mendenhall headstone from southern California. The news showed up in the papers, and one person who saw the articles was local Graveyard Rabbit Cheryl Palmer who made mention in her blog "<http://graveyardrabbitofsouthalamedaco.blogspot.com/>". Cheryl in turn was contacted by Mendenhall descendant Gregg Emory who is, if I have counted correctly, the 4th generation descendant of our town's founder, William M. Mendenhall. The story however is about Gregg's great-grandfather, Asa Mendenhall. Gregg told me that Asa's life had periods of great prosperity, including at one time purchasing a parcel of the Las Positas land grant for \$40,000 early in the 20th century, but by the time of his death in 1933 he and the family were broke, without even the means to bury his ashes in the Mendenhall family plot at Roselawn. Intent on keeping the family together, Asa's son Edwin, and Edwin's daughter (Gregg's mother) Merlin, crept towards Roselawn after dark and, after deciding not to jump the fence, buried Asa's wooden or ceramic urn somewhere outside the cemetery. And that is all Gregg's mother told him. Not the location, not even which side of the cemetery, but definitely nearby. A little bit of mystery to think about next time you drive past.

And so it is with history. The stories are mostly, possibly probably true, and they add life and character to the pieces of our past.

Hopefully you will be able to join us for our Annual General Meeting on September 26th. Our speaker is Susan Canfield, daughter of local photographer Elliott Dopking. Susan will share some of Elliott's photos, and perhaps a few stories after we enjoy a delicious dinner from Kinders BBQ Grill. Please join us!

Jeff Kaskey

Remembering Henrietta Greer: 1908-2009

Henrietta Greer died at age 101 on August 2nd. In a series of interviews in 2003, Greer discussed Nissen family history, her early years in Marin County and her life in the Livermore Valley since 1936.

Greer's mother was Margaret Stewart (née Nissen), the sole graduate of Livermore High School's class of 1897 (the smallest in school history). May Nissen (1884-1981), the longtime L.H.S. teacher who is widely regarded as one of the most important women in Livermore history, was her aunt.

Her Nissen grandparents rented a ranch in the 1880s in what is now Dublin. It was along the westerly side of Tassajara Creek, a bit north of today's I-580 freeway. The Casterson ranch neighbored it. Buildings from the Casterson ranch still stood until the final years of the 20th century, she said. Mrs. Greer said that her grandparents, both Danish immigrants, spoke very good English, but her mother's generation knew very little Danish.

Her grandparents' family moved to a 160-acre ranch on Patterson Pass Road east of Livermore in 1892. In her mother's time, most farmers planted hay and grain, even in the hills, much of which was harvested by hand. "Everyone got good exercise in those days – both boys and girls – because they had lots of work to do on ranches," Mrs. Greer said.

After attending a normal (teachers') school, Mrs. Greer's mother moved to Marin County in the early 1900s. She was a teacher at the one-room Halleck School near Tomales Bay, but was forced to quit after marriage. Born on an Olema farm in 1908, Mrs. Greer attended elementary school in Nicasio and was graduated from Tamalpais Union High School in 1926.

The Nissen Patterson Pass ranch ultimately became the dairy where Mrs. Greer lived with her

husband Thomas. They most often shipped "market milk" to Carnation in Oakland. When the Greers moved to the ranch in 1936, it had telephone service (a shared "farmer's line") but no electricity.

In the early 1960s, the State of California built the South Bay Aqueduct through the Greer ranch, severing the five acres of buildings from the cattle pasture. The Greers sold their cattle on October 31, 1960 because the dairy no longer would be viable. Although the State eventually erected a private bridge across the canal, there was no means to transport the cattle to the milking area during construction. (In 1962, Governor "Pat" Brown dedicated the aqueduct, the first completed unit of the massive State Water Project, at a ceremony near the Greer ranch, but she had no recollection of the event.)

Mrs. Greer knew her Aunt May Nissen very well. "She was a woman who did things very systematically," she recalled. Miss Nissen moved with her parents to 508 McLeod Street in central Livermore in 1918. Miss Nissen cared for her disabled mother and brother for many years while she taught English and Latin at L.H.S.

Mrs. Greer said that Jack Williams, later the founder of Alden Lane Nursery, frequently misbehaved in Miss Nissen's class. Instead of sending miscreants to the principal's office, Miss Nissen forced them to memorize poems on her "mourners' bench" and then recite them to her. After Mr. Williams selected D'Arcy's "Face on the Barroom Floor," Nissen began assigning poems to him, Mrs. Greer said. Mrs. Greer, along with much of Livermore's population, attended Miss Nissen's retirement party in 1948.

During lunch at the ranch one afternoon circa 1974, Mrs. Greer noticed that her Aunt May seemed very nervous. Miss Nissen slowly admitted that the head office of her bank had phoned her that morning to say that it needed her
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Greer *(Continued from Page 3)*

help to confirm the dishonesty of a bank teller at the Livermore branch. She was to withdraw a large sum and deliver the cash to a "bank agent" at the Livermore post office. Miss Nissen said that she planned to comply with the bank's request after lunch.

An appliance repairman from Oakland happened to join the Greers and Nissen for lunch; he said that he had heard of such a scam elsewhere in the Bay Area. Mr. Greer immediately phoned the bank manager, who in turn informed the police who eventually apprehended suspects. After Miss Nissen nearly fell victim to the "pigeon drop" scam, she gave up most of her independence. She continued to live in her McLeod Street residence by day, but spent nights at the Greer ranch the following seven years until she died.

Mrs. Greer often spoke of her brother Boyd Stewart, who also lived to age 101, and her friend Dr. Grace Devnich, also a centenarian, who died in 2008 (see Newsletter, Nov.-Dec. 2008 issue).

The Nissen/Greer family has enjoyed a long association with the First Presbyterian Church in Livermore. A window at the church is dedicated to the Nissen family. The church also manages the Tom and Henrietta Greer Scholarship Fund.

-By Jason Bezis



The modern Army motor convoy rolls past the Guild's Duarte Highway Garage on Portola Avenue (the former Lincoln Highway), looking quite historic in black and white. 2009 photo by David Abrahams.

Convoy *(Continued from Page 1)*

In Nebraska, trucks were mired down in sandy roads after a heavy rain; the wooden bridges in Wyoming had to be rebuilt because they could not support the military trucks. As a result of these experiences, the convoy averaged just 58 miles a day, at an average speed of 6 miles per hour.

When the Motor Transport Corps crossed over from Nevada, drivers were surprised at the quality of the Lincoln Highway in California. The convoy's "Daily Log" reported that the Stockton-Oakland segment was the "best section of entire Lincoln Highway." Col. McClure was quoted in the *Herald* as saying he "might have to put blocks on the wheels of the trucks to restore the bumps to which they had become accustomed in crossing the continent".

After the convoy's arrival at Oakland, the men and their equipment were ferried across the Bay and back on land, through San Francisco to the Presidio. (The Bay Bridge opened 17 years later.)

One of the Army observers was Lt. Colonel Dwight Eisenhower. His experience in 1919 led to the creation of the Interstate Highway System 37 years later when he was President.

The Military Vehicle Preservation Association sponsored a re-enactment of the 1919 transcontinental Army motor convoy in 2009, in part to honor Abraham Lincoln's 200th birthday. Many World War II-era military vehicles participated. The convoy passed through Livermore on July 8th en route to the U.S.S. Hornet museum in Alameda and San Francisco.

The 2009 convoy stopped along Altamont Pass Road, but canceled a stop at the Duarte Garage in Livermore due to concerns about afternoon commute traffic in the immediate Bay Area later that day. So, in 1919 and again in 2009, the transcontinental Army Motor Convoy made all-too-brief visits to Livermore.

-By Gary Drummond

Germans Read About Livermore's Eternal "Glühlampen"

Livermore's centennial light bulb, burning for 108 years has been and continues to be of interest to many not just locally, but throughout the world. Now that Germany is going away from incandescent light bulbs, two German reporters, independent of each other, thought a column about the centennial bulb was timely. They came to Livermore to see the bulb, and to do research on the bulb and the community of 1901.

For those of you who wonder what the centennial bulb is, perhaps a bit of history is helpful.

In 1901, Mr. Dennis Bernal gave a light bulb to the Livermore fire station, then manned by volunteers. The bulb gave just enough light so the men could get to their equipment when a call came. The bulb, always burning, hung in the station on First Street. As the years went by, **firemen sometimes hit the bulb** as they went out on a call. **It was used other times** as a target for Nerf football.

In 1972, Mike Dunston wrote a news article about the bulb. It was only then that people realized what a treasure was hanging in the fire station.

The light bulb was carefully moved to Fire Station No. 6 on East Avenue, where it continues its gentle glow, now hanging high above the floor of the truck bay.

As time went on the bulb made it into Ripley's Believe It or Not and other publications. In 2000, a committee was formed to put together a 100th birthday party for the light bulb in 2001. It was a great party, attended by well over 600 people. A web site, www.centennialbulb.org, was set up and is still going today.

The committee, now unofficial, meets at least once a year. Members of the committee are often called to meet with reporters, field questions and

running stories about the bulb. A children's book, by Juliette Goodrich, came out last year. Another children's book about the bulb is due out next year written by Janet Nolan.

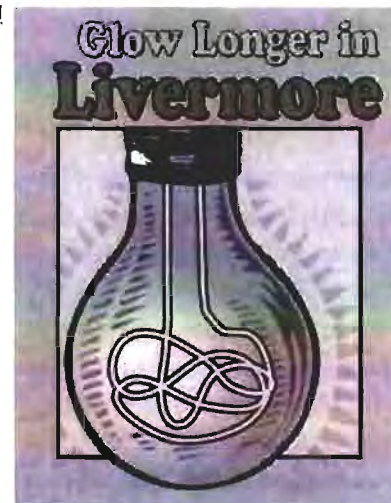
The German reporters who came this past month were Karin Steinberger of *Southern Deutsche Zeitung*, Germany's largest newspaper. Her column and that by Dr. Christoph von Marschall of *Tagespiegel*, came out the weekend of August 29th-30th (his headline, "Glühlampen: Die ewige Birne" imperfectly translates into "Electric Lamp: The Eternal Pear").

Committee members, most also Heritage Guild members, helped the reporters with their research, showed them about town to see buildings that were here in 1901 and the site of the first fire station, approximately in the center of the parking lot for Wells Fargo Bank on Second Street.

The reporters were delightful people. This "duty" as Guild members and Light Bulb Committee members is a most enjoyable one. The reporters were told about teachers using the light bulb as a means to teach children history. Some of us also mentioned that we feel the exchange that happens around the bulb is very good diplomacy.

Yes, there is talk of a 110th birthday party for the light bulb in 2011!

By Anna Siig



Calendar

SEPTEMBER

A History Lecture will not be scheduled this month due to the Annual General Meeting, on Sat., Sep. 26 at the Duarte Garage. Susan Dopking Canfield will show photos from her father's collection.

The Duarte Garage will be closed for September due to preparations for the Annual General Meeting.

OCTOBER

Duarte Garage Open. Sunday, Oct. 18 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. On "old Lincoln Highway" at Portola Ave. and I. St., Livermore.

History Lecture. -Wed., Oct. 21 Don Meeker will give a talk on "Toliver's Airship" = built in 1905. Doors open at 7 p.m.; talk at 7:30 p.m. At Civic Center Library 1188 S. Livermore Ave. in Livermore.

50 Years Ago Two chain supermarkets opened in Livermore in late 1959. First, Purity opened a store at the northwesterly corner of 1st & P, replacing the store that opened at 1st & L in 1941 (today housing the Donut Wheel and other businesses). The 1959 Purity building (later Big John's Ranch Market) was demolished in 1972 to make way for the parking lot of today's Safeway store (opened 1975). Second, Lucky opened a store at 2930 Pacific Ave. (Vineyard Center), which closed in 1980 when the Depot Center (now gone) opened on Railroad Ave. The expanded building housed Nob Hill Foods from 1983 to 2002 and is now vacant. In Feb. 1960, the longtime L. Schenone & Co. grocery store closed at 2278 First Street.

Join Us At the AGM!

The Heritage Guild is getting ready for its Annual General Meeting on Saturday, September 26.

Don't miss your chance to see and be seen by other Livermore heritage minded folks. Come say hi to friends you have not seen in a while and thank our great volunteers for the work they do in keeping the Guild vibrant.

This year we again have the music of the Valley Banjo Band and their fun toe-tapping tunes. While they pluck we will feast on chicken and beef from Kinder's. Marie and Ron volunteered to sample their menu to make sure the offerings were up to Guild standards and reported back all thumbs up (Thanks for the sacrifice you two!).

We have some Guild business, including voting in our revised bylaws, and then the headliner is Susan Canfield who will present a collection of photographs from her father Elliott Dopking. Susan has been working her way through his collection for months and has some great photos to show us.

The meal this year is value-priced at \$16 including decadent desserts from Guild members' kitchens, and drink tickets are \$1. One ticket for fizzy and sugary, three tickets for a complex bouquet with crisp citrus forward notes and a quince finish. Actually, the wines are yet to be chosen, but we intend to choose well. If you have not already reserved a meal, please do so with the form included in this newsletter.
-By Jeff Kaskey

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Mast Head Photo (page 1):

The Transcontinental Army Convoy re-enactment passes Duarte Garage in Livermore. 2009 photo by David Abrahams.

Livermore's Heritage in the Media

We may have our roots in the 19th century, but we are getting some play in 21st century media. On the previous page Anna describes our light bulb being featured in German newspapers. Sure, papers have been with us for centuries, but jetting around to do a story on a light bulb seems rather more modern.

Speaking of Annas, you may have caught either of the two video segments done about the Guild on TV30's "Slice of Life" program. Both were created by TV30's Anna Karagakis, one featuring the Duarte Garage, and the other about Guild programs in general, shot in the Carnegie History Center. Anna did a great job of creating positive stories about the work of the Guild. The shows do occasionally repeat, and are also available as DVDs from Tri-Valley Community Television.

Recently, 1984 Livermore High School graduate Erik Nelson has included snippets of Livermore's historic buildings in his 1890's San Francisco-ish cartoon for preschoolers. Go to youtube.com and search on "Cubbie the Cable Car" to view the current work. The First Street City Hall/Firehouse is prominent, as seen here, but see if you can catch the old French Laundry building and others.

Don't forget we have our presence on the Web created and kept current by webmaster Bob Bronzan. Always a good place to go for information about upcoming history lectures, as well as the photo and object of the month. Bob has updated the site with more of Anne Homan's articles. Thumbnails of some of the 1000's of scanned photos in our collection are also available there.

Speaking of the web, your Guild is prominently mentioned in Livermore's listing as a Preserve America city. This federal program recognizes communities that "protect and celebrate their heritage." Go to www.PreserveAmerica.gov and click on the "List of Preserve America Communities" on the right side. Many thanks to our city government, and city planner and friend of the Guild Frank Guido for the effort involved in getting Livermore listed.

And for a little more international flair, two of our photos from the Altamont concert 40 years ago were used and credited in a French newsletter "été Libération". We're getting around!

-By Jeff Kaskey

Cubbie The Cable Car



Stylized for sure, but even the window details are accurate for the old city hall at First & McLeod!

Passing of the Pen

Yes, after years of diligent service, Maxine Trost has passed her editor's pencil on to Jason Bezis as the new newsletter editor. During Maxine's tenure, the Guild's newsletter became a professional publication composed in modern publishing software and printed with high quality in attractive color. We get constant compliments on the new format and hope it entices more recipients to read through all of the Guild news. A huge Thank You to Maxine!

Jason graduated class of '91 at Livermore High School, where he held the post of newspaper historian during the L.H.S. centennial year (1990-91), so this new role is a perfect fit for his voracious interest in local history. Computer software was NOT his passion, so send warm feelings his way as he struggles to master the technical world of publishing. -By Jeff Kaskey

Livermore High School Dedicated Science Buildings: 1957 & 2009

Livermore High School opened a new science building in early 2009. Principal Darrel Avilla and others wielded giant scissors and cut a ribbon to inaugurate nine classrooms, teacher preparation areas, and a quad area for students. The \$11 million project backs onto East Avenue.

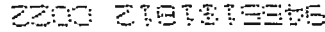
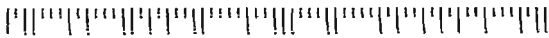
The original L.H.S. science building opened in November 1957, a few weeks after the Soviet Union launched Sputnik I, the first Earth-orbiting artificial satellite, provoking the "Space Race." The *Livermore News* reported that six science teachers helped the architect to design the "most up to date" facilities. Major advances in science and technology have occurred in the half-century since its opening, including the advent of human space travel, lasers, microprocessors and advanced D.N.A. research.

The school sponsored a dedication ceremony on the evening of November 13, 1957 for the Science Building, the Metal Shop and the Girls' Gymnasium (now called "Small Gym"). The 1925 gym became the Music Building.

Alluding to the Cold War "education gap" furor exacerbated by the Sputnik launch, Science Department head Ken Teberg invited the public to inspect the new science building "at a time when this nation has been aroused as never before over science programs, scientific research, education and science students." Teachers greeted parents and the public in the new buildings. The L.H.S. band, directed by Gordon Mallory, played musical selections.

Three students performed the actual dedication of each building: Marilyn Rummell (science), Judy Meyers (gym) and Dennis Johnson (metal shop), all of the Class of '58.

Today Johnson is a retired metal artist. Appropriately, cowboys (the L.H.S. mascot) are among his favorite subjects. Judy Meyers Brame became a professor of kinesiology at California State University, Northridge, where she was active in the athletic program and inducted into the school's Athletic Hall of Fame. Marilyn Rummell Smith now teaches concert piano in Tucson, Arizona.



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