

Do You Remember?

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Treasure Hunting and the Foscalsina Family

Earlier this year, when cleaning out their grandfather's attic, an Ohio family discovered rare old baseball cards that are worth thousands of dollars. I can't promise you rich rewards, but I do encourage you to look carefully through boxes of old family records and photographs. John Foscalsina did this recently, and he discovered a Vasco drawing.

When Dick Finn and I were putting together our book, *Vasco's Livermore, 1910*, the Foscalsinas showed us a Xerox copy of a caricature that resembled those in the Berry collection, but it did not have Vasco's signature. We considered including it in the book but finally decided against it. Recently, after the death of his mother, John was going through some of her papers. He found the original caricature of Simon Foscalsina, his great-grandfather, and it did have Vasco's familiar signature near the bottom. Unfortunately, something dark rubbed against the bottom half of the drawing and the little yellow bird tugging at Simon's pants leg is no longer yellow.

Simon Foscalsina was born in 1847 in Piedmont, a mountainous region in the northwest of Italy. His father, George, brought the family to the U.S. and opened a trading post in 1866 near Sunol, at the intersection of Foothill Boulevard and Vallecitos Road. One day George Foscalsina bought, in all innocence, a steer that had been stolen. When the owner saw a steer hide marked with his brand

draped over Foscalsina's corral fence, he accused the storekeeper of rustling. Sheriff Morse eventually caught the thieves and cleared him of any involvement. In *Lawman*, his biography of Sheriff Morse, John Boessenecker quoted from Morse's diary, "I found [George Foscalsina] to be fair and upright in his affairs. If some well-known disreputable character showed up in his vicinity he was prompt in his notification of the fact to me." About 1870 George sold his business and moved to El Dorado County, where he and some of his ten sons worked as gold miners. Simon, however, moved to Livermore.

In 1867 Simon Foscalsina attended a fandango at the rancho of Joseph Livermore. Probably because Simon was a small person, "El Macho" Feliciano began to bully him, threatening him with a knife. Finally, Simon tried to escape on horseback, but Feliciano followed him, still slashing at him. Simon shot and killed him. Justice Marks of Pleasanton cleared Foscalsina of any charges. Vasco's caricature of Simon shows him as a small man, but at age 63, he was still in good shape—no pot belly. He was a farmer, stock raiser, horsebreaker, raiser of hogs and chickens. On 29 December 1883, he and Ellen Ladd, daughter of the founder of Laddsville, a small settlement that was a precursor to Livermore, married in Oakland. They had three sons and one daughter and lived in a house at the southeast corner of Third and O Street.



One of their sons was John Foscalsina's grandfather, George Louis Foscalsina.

George married Katherine Minoggio and they had two children, Charlotte and Charles. Sadly, Katherine died when she was 23 years old in the influenza epidemic of 1918. Charlotte was only five and Charlie three. For a while their grandmother Ellen Foscalsina minded the children, but she died in December 1921. The Minoggio family took Charlotte under their wing, and Charlie was farmed out to a family named Alviso. He was not very happy with them. In high school, he took Spanish, which he had learned from the Alvisos. He soon discovered that his teacher was not enchanted with his version of Spanish, and he failed the course. He quit high school. One day Charlie was hanging around downtown when his uncle, Phil Minoggio, happened to see him. He grabbed Charlie by the neck of his shirt and told him, "You're not going to be a bum—you're

going to be a plumber!" He took Charlie to Oakland and introduced him to the plumbing business. Charlie, however, was not too thrilled with this and returned to Livermore. His uncle caught him again and once more took him off to be a plumber. This time he stayed the course. The country was in the depths of the Depression, however, and starting a new business would be a risky affair. He joined the Civilian Conservation Corps and worked at logging and other jobs in the forests. When he quit, he decided that he would take the next train that came along. It was headed south, so Charlie took what fate had allotted him and came south to Livermore. In 1932 he started Charlie's Plumbing Company.

Eventually, Charlie's plumbing business was successful, and he married Maxine Clelland in 1938. They had three sons, Charles (called Butch), John, and Jim. John, the middle of the boys, was born in 1941. After graduation from Livermore High he had thought of heading into the army, but then his father said, "We need a plumbing apprentice," and John chose to learn the trade. John never ran his own firm but worked as a plumber for other companies. Retired in 1990, he enjoys his property at the northeast corner of South Livermore and Concannon. He showed me the result of his hobby—a beautifully carved leather purse. Now, one of his sons runs the Foscalsina Plumbing Company here in Livermore.

John is proud of the caricature of his great-grandfather, Simon Foscalsina. Perhaps, if you look at the old records stored in your attic or your basement, you, too, will discover a hidden treasure! The caricatures were drawn on 8 1/2 by 10 inch paper.

(Readers can reach me at am50homan@yahoo.com.)