

## Do You Remember?



By Anne Homan  
Livermore City Historian

### Francis Sadoc Fennon

One of the main sources of money for Livermore Valley ranchers and farmers between 1900 and 1914 was raising large draft horses. To exhibit the results of their efforts, local men organized horse shows.

In 1904, a typical horse show in Livermore featured a parade of over 20 blocks long that exhibited not only the heavy work-horses—Normans, Clydesdales, Percherons, Belgians—but also horses that were roadsters, trotters, and carriage horses. About 2,000 out-of-town visitors came for the event.

Francis “Frank” Fennon was the Grand Marshal for at least seven of these horse shows. Today our rodeo parade’s grand marshal is an honorary office, but Frank’s duties were far from honorary. He was in charge of the horse parade, planning the order and route through the streets. He had to choose knowledgeable friends who could help him set up and control the parade of horses, most of them stallions, and keep them quiet in front of the reviewing stand at the corner of Lizzie (now Livermore Avenue) and First Streets. In 1901 Fennon himself showed two horses he owned—“Reno” and “Carson.”

Frank Sadoc Fennon was born in San Pablo, California, in 1865. His parents had immigrated from Longford County, Ireland, sometime before the birth of their

first child in California in 1861. His father died of tuberculosis when Frank was only 14. His older brother and his father were butchers; presumably, Frank learned the skills of that trade from them. He came to Livermore at age 23, probably at first working in one of the butcher shops in the community. In January 1897 he took over the butcher shop of Collier and Burns and called it the Grand Central Meat Market.

The Livermore Heritage Guild has an early photo of such a Livermore shop, showing large carcasses hanging from a ceiling track (an overhead trolley) and smaller carcasses hanging from a wall track. Two butchers stand ready to serve their customers. They are wearing capacious bib aprons; one of them has protective cuffs on his wrists. There are thick wooden butcher blocks for cutting the meat. One man stands behind a marble-topped counter that displays various cuts of meat.

On the morning of 26 November 1891 Father Power married

Frank and Annie McCormick, daughter of a well-known valley ranching family, at St. Michael’s. After the ceremony her parents hosted a dinner at their home. In the afternoon the newly-married pair left for their wedding tour. In 1907 they bought one of my favorite houses in Livermore, the Victorian cottage at 2221 Third Street. They had eight children, born from 1892 to 1902.

At Christmas time in 1897 the *Herald* acknowledged that Fennon, the newcomer to the butchering business in his Grand Central Meat Market, had out-rivaled all other butchers in town with his display: “Fatted calves, young stall-fed steers, porkers, mutton, and lambs are there in galore. Upon a raised platform are two huge porkers . . . they are as fat and round as butter balls. On the center of the table is a miniature snow-covered wagon to which are hitched four roast-ers. A wee pig attends to the driving . . . ‘Bound for the Klondike’ is written on the wagon’s side.”

Earlier in December, Fennon hung a beef and gave his

customers a week to guess at its weight—only one guess per person. Out of 1,104 guesses made, six customers guessed 625 pounds: Mrs. O’Leary, Dan Teeters, William Munos, William Dolan, John Callaghan Sr., and L. Van Horn. The prize for the closest guess was a prime rib roast; the actual weight was 625 ½ pounds. We’ll never know how Fennon solved his dilemma—the extant newspapers do not tell us!

In April 1903, according to the *Herald*, Fennon added to his butcher shop equipment a “computing scale that is a marvel of mechanical ingenuity.” The article adds, “Mr. Fennon has also one of the latest model cash registers and taken altogether his shop is thoroughly up-to-date.”

In December 1904 William Stoeven opened a new butcher shop in Livermore, called the California Market, on the south side of First Street between McLeod and Lizzie Streets in the Connelly building. The main feature of his shop was a cold storage system. It was about 15 feet square and located in the middle

of his shop. Rather than using the traditional ice, a Cyclops refrigerating machine was driven by an electric motor to keep the shop’s meat cold. He put a window in one wall of the unit.

The March 10, 1906 issue of the *Herald* ran a front-page article about the disappearance of Mr. Stoeven, who had evidently absconded from his creditors, his wife, and his children. Two weeks later, W.H. Martin and F.S. Fennon bought Stoeven’s business from his creditors for \$1,800 and carried on their butchering business in both Pleasanton and Livermore. In 1908 Fennon bought out his Pleasanton partner; he was left with his two shops in Livermore. One year later, he sold his original shop to Moy Brothers. In 1914 he closed the Stoeven shop.

Fennon often traveled to Reno to purchase cattle that he shipped back to Livermore by train. On his trip in the fall of 1918, he became ill and spent several weeks in a hospital there. He returned home and everyone assumed he was better, but he died several weeks later on October 18 in Livermore. He had been active as a volunteer firefighter and as a Native Son of the Golden West. Annie died thirteen years later.

(Readers can reach me at [am50homan@yahoo.com](mailto:am50homan@yahoo.com).)