

Do You Remember?



By Anne Homan
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Hansen Family

In my column about the Hansen rose garden, I explained that it had been named after Rasmus A. Hansen. This column will explain the history of his family in Livermore.

After a flour mill that the Laumeister brothers had built burned down in 1894, Livermore was without a mill until 1906, when H.P. Hansen and a partner built the Diamond Flour Mill at the same site, on First Street across from the Old City Hall and Firehouse. The structure had three floors, with a cement basement containing the line shaft that drove the mill. When the machinery was being installed on January 20, 1906, the millers had already bought 250 bags of valley wheat from Daniel M. Teeter to grind as soon as everything was ready.

According to the *Herald*, with the opening of the flour mill local farmers would have not only a ready market for their grain but also their family's yearly supply of flour in trade. At first, the mill would concentrate on making white flour and steaming and rolling barley, but they hoped later to manufacture whole-wheat and graham flour. Hans Pedersen Hansen and his wife, Maria Dorothea Rasmussen, had come separately to this country

in the early 1880s from Denmark, possibly as indentured servants who worked for a number of years to earn their freedom. Hans worked as a farm laborer; Dorothea served the Holm family as a seamstress. They married in Livermore.

Their son, Rasmus, born in Livermore in 1886, graduated from Livermore High and the Oakland Polytechnic Business College. When he returned to Livermore, he had a part in installing the first electric lights in town. In 1907 he began his first local business venture, taking over Fletcher's bicycle shop. Then, in 1911 he joined his father in the mill and grain business and bought a home at 766 South M Street, a lovely Queen Anne style house built in 1906. In 1912 Rasmus succeeded in finding a truck needed for their business: a ton and a half Alma that could reach a speed of 15 miles per hour. Late in June 1911, Rasmus married school-teacher Mabel Ross. She had attended normal school in Oakland and taught locally at Highland and Green Schools. They spent their honeymoon in Santa Cruz.

In 1918 H.P. Hansen retired from milling and Rasmus took over the business completely,

eventually turning it into a grain buying outfit. He used the mill for grain storage; the railroad was convenient for shipping. The mill was razed in 1936. Not long after the retirement of his father, Rasmus Hansen also began selling liquefied petroleum gas for home furnaces. Through the years, he sold various fuel oil and gas products, including butane, propane, and bottled gas. The Hetch Hetchy project was one of his best customers.

In 1926 his family, now including two children, moved to a two-story concrete home that had been designed by V.D. Vorhees for grain warehouseman H.P. Winegar in 1908. It stood on a four-acre compound on Fourth Street that included a swimming pool. Rasmus Hansen served as a city councilman and member of Zone 7 besides being an elementary school trustee, a director of the Livermore Rodeo for 18 years, president of the Chamber of Commerce for more than 20 years, a volunteer in the Livermore Fire Department, and a member of Company I, National Guard. Active in promotion of a local airport, in 1928 he was the first person in Livermore to



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receive his private pilot's license, and he flew frequently until World War II. He belonged to a number of fraternal organizations and was a charter member of the Livermore Lion's Club. For many years he served as a trustee at the First Presbyterian Church. Hansen's son, Ross, remembered him as a constant reader and lover of travel.

An editorial by Maitland R. Henry said of Rasmus Hansen, "He was a boy at heart always, even as he approached three score and ten, and always had a joke to enliven a gathering and temper the hard pace at which he would direct a meeting." Wayne Calhoun recalled "Rassy" Hansen's favorite stunt at the rodeo parade—carefully shoveling trash

and horse manure from the parade route into a wheelbarrow, pretending to be unaware that it had a hole in the bottom. He had a collection of old cars and often drove one of them in the parade. Rasmus Hansen died in 1956 and was buried in the Masonic Cemetery. In recognition of his public service, the flag was flown at half mast the day of his funeral.

Rasmus and Mabel's son, Ross Hansen, attended Livermore schools and was drafted into the Army after his graduation from Stanford. He spent four years in the China/Burma/India Theater during World War II as commanding officer of an ordnance unit that worked on the Burma Road. When he returned home, he worked for the R.A. Hansen Com-

pany until his retirement in 1980. He married Patricia Rivers in 1956, and they had two children, H.R. (Rik) Hansen Jr. and Sarah. Ross also bought the old Teeter place on Arroyo Road, where he raised grain, planted 60 acres of walnuts, and ran some cattle.

The area is now covered with houses. Ross's service to the community included 10 years on the Alameda County Board of Education as well as serving as a board member of the Oakland Symphony, Family Service Agency of Alameda County, the Alameda County TB Association, and Creede Repertory Theatre. Rasmus and Mabel Hansen's daughter, Rae, graduated from Mills College and married Earl Ising.

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