

Do You Remember?



By Anne Homan
Livermore City Historian

Livermore Soda Works

The Livermore Soda Works operated in Livermore for 109 years, from 1876 until 1985, under various owners. Drinkable soda water was first created by Dr. Joseph Priestly in 1767 in England. By the mid-1800s, experimenters in Philadelphia and New York City were adding flavored syrups to soda water. The first owner of the Livermore Soda Works, Wallis & Company, advertised in 1876 with a poem in the *Livermore Enterprise*: Wine is a mocker if strong drink's raging;/ Alcohol's poison, most deadly they say;/Liquor to some tastes is very assuaging,/Life is prolonged by Bill Sinkwitz's 'tea' (tay)/ But I'll vouch for my trio to make the lips mellow,/ Soda, Raspberry and Sarsaparilla."

Wallis & Company had settled into a building on L Street between First and Second. Eventually Wallis sold the business to the Gardemeyer brothers, Christian and Henry, who ran it from another location in the Northern Addition, at the corner of North Livermore Avenue and Oak Street. Christian and his wife, Johanna, built a three-bedroom cottage still standing at the northwest corner of North Livermore Avenue and Chestnut Street; the two brothers bought both pieces of land in the area in June 1882. The brothers expanded their delivery, using not

only a wagon for local deliveries, but also the railroad. "Messrs. Gardemeyer Bros. have one wagon running constantly, and supplying all the small towns within 25 miles, and are, besides, shipping large quantities of their wares by rail. They now have upward of 2,000 dozen of soda and cider bottles in use in their business, and are yet obliged to be constantly enlarging the number, to fill orders."

After her husband's death in 1885, Joanna sold the soda works and, after several other owners, Fred Menken of Oakland took over. His driver, Julius Jacobs, was hospitalized with a compound fracture of the leg when his delivery wagon was struck by a Southern Pacific train freight car while workmen were switching cars near the depot. The wagon was reduced to scattered bits and splinters. He sued for \$20,000, but the case was thrown out of court. Jacobs purchased the business around 1895 and moved it across town to South K Street. In 1902 Jacobs opened another soda water business in Santa Cruz. Both Jacobs and his partner were killed in 1905 when a pressurized tank exploded while they were filling bottles at the Santa Cruz site.

Before moving to

Santa Cruz in 1902, Jacobs had sold the Livermore business to Warren Lamb. Lamb moved the business a block away on South K Street between Fifth and Sixth Streets; he became the distributor for the Union Ice Company at the same time and combined his deliveries. Many of the surviving bottles date from this era; the image of a lamb is the logo on many of the embossed bottles. In 1910 Lamb took on two partners, George Tubbs and Ernest Utendorffer. While under their ownership, the company won an award in 1915 at the Panama Exposition for its ginger ale. The Soda Works, like other businesses in town at this time, sponsored a baseball team. In 1914 and 1919, the Soda Works bought delivery trucks, and the horse and wagons were gone. By 1921 Tubbs was sole owner. In 1923 he sold out to Harold Anderson and John Bettencourt, who built a new stucco building in 1930 on land owned by Anderson around the corner on Sixth Street.

Harold Anderson's nephew, Warner Anderson, worked for the company in the 1930s, washing bottles and delivering ice door to door in the summer. In the winter, Warner said, "the business died to nothing." When Prohibition was lifted, the firm's name was changed



Sitting on the wagon is Ernest "Speck" Utendorffer. Photo courtesy of Livermore Heritage Guild.

to the Livermore Beverage Company. They began distributing not only soft drinks but also beer, wine, and hard liquor. After several other changes, Warner and Bob Anderson ran the company from 1960 to 1966. Apparently, at this time they had difficulty with procuring insurance that would cover the use of the old machinery for making the bubbly beverages under high pressure. From this time on, the wholesale business was associated with the Pepsi Cola Company and mainly delivered canned soft drinks to local supermarkets and vending machine companies. The old bottling machine was sold to a salvage company in San Jose for its scrap metal value.

In 1985, when Bob Anderson and his son Ted were running the business, the 1930 building and its contents were destroyed by fire. "Flames leaped several feet into the air as smoke poured from the top of the Livermore Beverage Co. building in a residential area on Sixth Street." Neighbors gathered to

watch from blocks around. The structure was gutted, but the fire was contained from spreading to nearby homes. Livermore Fire called for help from the VA Hospital, the Lab, Pleasanton, and Sunol. The business never reopened, probably because it was in a residential area. The beverage company was permitted at this site before the current zoning was adopted, but rebuilding would require complying with the current zoning.

The old embossed soda water bottles, both the familiar crown type and the Hutchinson, which has a wire and rubber stopper are fairly rare. I checked on ebay the other day, and a Livermore Soda Works Hutchinson bottle sold for \$69. A similar seltzer bottle went for \$60. (Many thanks to Larry Mauch for his research.)

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

Wildlife Experts Presentation Set at Pleasanton Library

Wildlife experts Jenny Papka of Native Bird Connection and Jay Sheets of Hawk Talk bring several species of live owls and hawks to the Pleasanton Library at 1:30 p.m. on Sat., Jan. 26.

Share in a close-up encounter with these amazing animals as their handlers illuminate the personal lives of each bird, involving the audience through stories and conversation.

No registration is required for this hour-long program, which is for children kindergarten age and older. Free tickets will be distributed in the Children's area 30 minutes prior to each show. Doors will be closed to late arrivals once the program begins.

For more information, please call the Children's Desk at (925) 931-3400 ext. 8 or check the library's website at www.ci.pleasanton.ca.us/services/library/programs-events-child.html.