

Do You Remember?

By Anne Homan



Can We Save Valentin Alviso's Old House?

Every other day or so, I pass the tired old house on my way to and from Livermore on North Livermore Avenue. I knew that it was on property once owned by Valentin Alviso, but because the house seemed to be a Craftsman bungalow, familiar to me as a style of the 1920s and 1930s and Alviso died in 1911, I did not investigate it further. Several weeks ago, Alice Quinn called and invited me to tour the house. The lady living there was anxious to have confirmation of its age and history. The owners had given her a month to vacate the property, and she was worried

that after she left, they might tear down the house. Earlier, they had torn down a large barn in the rear of the property.

We walked through the house and around it, but this only confirmed for me that it was a Craftsman bungalow. To the west of the house was a tankhouse and in back of that the trees visible from North Livermore Avenue turned out to be an olive orchard. I asked Charles Huff, a Pleasanton architect interested in the preservation of old buildings, to take a look. He said that the house was indeed the Craftsman style—it was typically used in

the countryside when architects were designing fancy Victorian houses in cities like San Francisco and Oakland. He estimated that the house was built between 1891 and 1892. If this is true, the house was built by Valentin Alviso. Alviso's earlier residence was shown on a map along with the olive orchard in the 1878 *Alameda County Atlas*. Perhaps in 1891 or 1892, Alviso decided to replace the house and include an indoor bathroom. The house has V-rustic redwood siding, but the tankhouse has redwood clapboard siding and, according to Huff, is much older than the

house.

I had learned from an article published in the *Livermore Herald* on 24 March 1887 that the olive trees were planted in 1870 and were of the mission variety. I e-mailed the Crohars, local experts in olive growing, and both father and son came out to look at the orchard. They confirmed the orchard is the mission variety and that the trees are quite old. With severe trimming, the trees could be brought back to productivity.

So who was Valentin Alviso? Why should we care about his old house and olive orchard?

Valentin Alviso farmed land west of North Livermore Avenue, today just north of I-580, where he ran cattle and grew grain, hay, cherries, and olives. He inherited this property, which was originally part of Rancho Las Positas, from his father-in-law, Robert Livermore. José Valentin del Carmen Alviso, called Valentin, was born in San Jose on St. Valentine's Day 1841. His father, Agustin, had a land grant near Newark; his grandfather, Ignacio, immigrated to California from Sonora, Mexico, as a child in 1776; his great-grandfather, Domingo, served as a corporal in de Anza's expedition. Unlike many of his fellow Californios, Valentin was an educated man, having attended Santa Clara College for three years and then in 1859 traveled to the East Coast via Panama to attend a college in Massachusetts.

After the outbreak of the Civil War, he returned to California and married Josefa Livermore, daughter of Robert and Josefa Livermore, at Mission San José in 1868; they moved to the Livermore Valley shortly afterward. At the final distribution of Robert Livermore's Rancho Las Positas in 1873, Alviso inherited over 800 acres. A member of the Republican Party, Valentin served as supervisor for Murray District for two terms from 1875 through

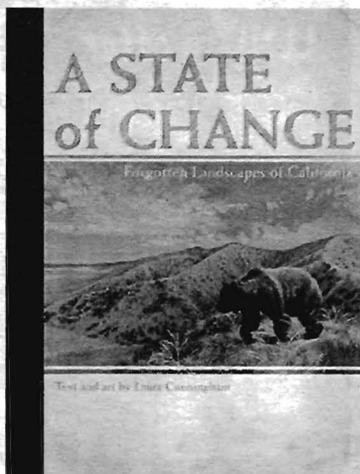
'State of Change' Author to Speak at Livermore Library

Author Laura Cunningham will discuss her book *State of Change: Forgotten Landscapes of California* at 2 pm on Sunday, October 2 at the Livermore Public Library Civic Center, 1188 S. Livermore Avenue.

There is no charge for this event. Books will be available for sale and signing.

Vernal pools, protected lagoons, grassy hills rich in bunchgrasses and, where the San Francisco Bay is today, ancient bison and mammoths roaming a vast grassland. Through the use of historical ecology, Laura Cunningham walks through these forgotten landscapes to uncover secrets about the past, explore what our future will hold and experience the ever-changing landscape of California.

Combining the skill of an accomplished artist with passion for landscapes and training as a naturalist, Cunningham has spent more than two decades poring over historical accounts, paleontology findings, and archaeological data. Traveling with paint box in hand, she tracked the remaining vestiges of semi-pristine landscape like a detective, seeking clues that revealed the California of past



centuries. She traveled to other regions as well, to sketch grizzly bears, wolves and other magnificent creatures that are gone from California landscapes.

In her studio, Cunningham created paintings of vast landscapes and wildlife from the raw data she collected, her own observations in the wild, and her knowledge of ecological laws and processes. Through *A State of Change*, readers are given the pure pleasure of wandering through these wondrous and seemingly exotic scenes of Old

California and understanding the possibilities for both change and conservation in our present day landscape.

Laura Cunningham, an artist and naturalist, studied paleontology and biology at the University of California, Berkeley. She has worked at various field biology jobs for the California Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. Geological Survey, and other organizations. Laura got to know such species as the Owens Valley pupfish, the southern California steelhead trout, the Yosemite toad, and the Panamint alligator lizard. Simultaneously, she has been studying and painting California's historic and living wildlife, flora, and unique landscapes. She lives with her husband and pet iguanas on a ranch next to Death Valley National Park where she cofounded the group Basin and Range Watch to explore the historical ecology of the desert ecosystems of California and Nevada and to protect them.

The Friends of the Livermore Library have underwritten this program as part of the Friends Authors and Arts Series. For additional events, check the library's website at www.livermorelibrary.net.

1878. In 1881 and 1882 he was an assemblyman in the California legislature. Ernesto, his only son, died of diphtheria in 1885 when he was seven years old. In April 1893 Valentin was appointed Keeper of the Spanish Archives for the state and served in that position until it was abolished in December 1894. Records of land cases in Alameda and Contra Costa County reveal that he helped less educated Spanish-speaking citizens in dealing with the court system.

The *Herald* described him in 1896: "There is no more picturesque personality in Livermore Valley than Valentine Alviso. A polished, educated gentleman, a pure Castilian by descent, he is a type of the Spaniard at his best." Josephine died in December 1893, so she only lived in the Craftsman style house for several years. After her death, Valentin rented the house and his property to rancher John Meyn. Local historian Virginia Bennett wrote about the house: The large rooms were ideal for entertaining. ... The Spanish love of a fiesta must have been built into the house for the Meyns loved to entertain." Valentin died in 1911 and is buried next to Josefa at St. Michael's Cemetery. Two daughters, Cristina and Antonia, survived them. The *Herald* announced on 30 June 1906 that Frank S. Gomes from Half Moon Bay had purchased the Alviso Ranch.

The City of Livermore allowed the Robert Livermore home to be torn down in 1954. Surely, we are more sensitive these days to the need to save such a rare historical building. Livermore Heritage Guild's Historical Museum Curator, Donald Smith, called the property manager about our concerns. Thank you, Charles Huff and Charles F. and Charles T. Crohare, for your help.

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