



Graham Barber at the egg washing machine - Verde Farm, 1957 (John S. Young)

When John S. Young was little, he enjoyed coming in the summers and during Easter and Christmas vacations to his great-grandfather's and his grandfather's chicken farm in Livermore, where he spent many happy days gathering eggs. He remembered a brooder (a heated building) with hundreds of chicks—"The floor was a solid yellow." We met about a week ago so that I could see some of the information he had about the farm.

At the north end of Hillcrest Avenue, the street makes a little jog and

Way, Barber Street, and Fordham Way. This pentagon shows roughly the area of the chicken farm. The Barbars also owned more property along Hillcrest, just to the north of East Avenue, now occupied partly by the Arbol Verde Apartments. Here they grew barley; they had room to grow alfalfa on the farm. Both of these crops were raised for chicken feed.

John H. Barber and his wife, Jean, had two children. Their daughter, Elsa, graduated from Livermore High in 1917, attended Stanford, and became a teacher. Their son, Graham

is the only member of his family who lives in Livermore now, and fortunately for me, he is the one who has inherited the family archives.

One of John's treasures is a hand-drawn detailed map of the farm, about 8 by 10 inches, drawn by his step-grandmother. It is very fragile and loosely held together by scotch tape that has turned brown. It shows the main house as well as the still existing house on Barber Street, which was called the "cottage." There was a barn, where John remembered playing in the hay. Trucks brought chicken feed that was poured into two 10-foot high metal silos. The chickens were all the same breed—Leghorns, which are white with a red comb and lay white eggs. Graham collected eggs twice a day in metal buckets and placed them in a six-foot square two-

Do You Remember?

By Anne Homan
Livermore City Historian



Peep, Peep, Cluck, Cluck

first by hand, but then with an egg-washing machine, dried, and placed in the egg boxes. They had 11 chicken houses, eight brooders, and a rooster house. John's mother, Elinor, remembered that fertilized eggs were sold to a hatchery in Fremont. They had an orchard, with each type of tree labeled on the map: almond, fig, peach, pear, apricot, apple, cherry, crabapple, and loquat. A small reservoir surrounded by weeping willows helped with pumping water for irrigation. They planted two stands of eucalyptus trees as windbreaks.

Before he came to Livermore, John H. Barber was manager of experimental farms conducted by the U.S. government and the University of California at Santa Monica, Paso Robles, Amador, and Pomona. In 1908 he leased a large orchard in the Carmel

County Farm Bureau in 1914, and an organizer of a cooperative called Poultry Producers of Central California. He served as the first president of the cooperative in 1918 and then as manager for several years. The Poultry Producers of Central California came to Livermore in 1929 and leased the mill building and several warehouses of the Diamond Milling Company on First Street across from the fire house. The cooperative received eggs from Livermore and Pleasanton members and shipped them to Hayward. It also carried feed for chickens and dairies. In 1951 the cooperative built a new building in Livermore—we now know the building as the Livermore Feed and Farm Supply at the end of Fourth Street across from the Livermore High School track. The Barbars did not sell their

eggs and chickens locally, but through the cooperative.

Through the years, local farms and ranches, and even some homes in town, often kept small chicken flocks for family use. Wives took pleasure in having fresh eggs and meat; sometimes they used them in trade. In 1913 Phillippa Clyma wrote in a letter to her daughter from their local farm: "Pap is going to town [Livermore] tomorrow—I have five squares of butter and 18 doz eggs—and sold two dozen eggs and one square of butter since he was in town last. My reds are laying all the eggs. The others are not laying hardly any." Her husband kept an account book with careful details of their trading. But in the early 1900s, a poultry industry began to develop. The Barber's Verde Farm was just one of many large enterprises that sprang up in and around Livermore. (To be continued next week.)

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becomes Barber Street. The fourth house on the right, at 164 Barber Street, is the only building left of the Barber family's Verde Poultry Farm. John H. Barber came to Livermore with his family on a frosty Christmas Eve, 1911; the farm was sold to developers in 1960. A map of Livermore shows an oddly-shaped pentagon near the old house, formed by Duke

worked at Verde Farm with his father and continued with the business after his father's death in 1957. Graham and his first wife, Dorothy, had one child—Elinor Jean Barber, who graduated from Livermore High and married James A. Young in 1949. They had three children, the oldest being John S. Young who gathered eggs at the beginning of this column. John

wheel cart, which he pulled to the egg room at the side of the main house. Here the eggs were washed, at

valley and shipped apples and pears to the New York market. He was one of the founders of the Alameda



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