

Do You Remember?



By Anne Homan

The Viale Family

Everyone showed up early in the morning and worked to fill the boxes placed in the vineyard aisles with plump red grapes. They raced to see who could pick the most; there was much laughter and singing. Beginning in the late 1920s, friends and relatives came to Livermore to help the Viales with the grape harvest on their 20 acres. Most of them had immigrated from the same part of Italy, the Piedmont. The women wore scarves and aprons. Grandma, "Nona" Rose Viale, cooked for days to have enough food for the crew.

Behind the big house was a large fig tree. They set up tables and chairs under its shade for the feast. Besides the barbecued meats, Nona served a number of courses: antipasti, ravioli, vegetables and beans, salad, and for dessert cookies and jello. "Nono" Louis kept some harvested grapes to make family wine—the rest he sold to Wentle.

Louis Viale and Rose Fassio were born in Montechiaro d'Asti, approximately in the center of the Piedmont area in northwestern Italy, in 1881 and 1884 respectively. They married in 1902; their first child, Frank, was born two years later. They emigrated to Marseille, France. Probably they left the family farm because of Louis's incapacitating asthma. In France Louis worked in a lumberyard and Rose as a cook. Frank began school in Marseille and became fluent in French as well as Italian. A cousin in Oakland sponsored them, and the three immigrated to the U.S. in 1911.

From newspaper and census records, the Viales' journey in Livermore is easily traced. They first lived southwest of town on Arroyo Road and ran a chicken farm. By 1920 they were north of town on a dairy farm. Louis "Louie" Viale was also a cattle buyer.

In October 1921 he injured his right hand badly when his

rifle went off unexpectedly; the accident resulted in the loss of his index finger. Two more children were born: Joseph "Joe" in 1916 and Attilio "Butch" in 1921. The Viales bought a brick house and 20 acres surrounding it along East Avenue in 1924. Louie purchased the California Meat Market on the south side of East First Street in 1930; he and Frank sold "a complete line of meats and meat market products, including live and dressed poultry."

Nine years later the Viales moved the California Meat Market a few doors east to new quarters at the corner of McLeod and First Streets; it was tucked into the northeast corner of the old Sweeney Opera House. They added a complete line of groceries and called the new store "Viale's Market."

Joe and Frank operated the business. Butch graduated from Livermore High in 1940. An outstanding athlete, he played football for three years and baseball for three years. He helped his brothers by delivering orders in a Dodge pickup. In November 1942 he was drafted by the army and served in the South Pacific. After his enlistment, Viale's Market discontinued deliveries due to a shortage of help and the difficulty of purchasing tires. Butch recovered from shrapnel wounds to his thigh on Okinawa and returned to help his brothers run the business.

Louie was small and wiry and very smart with figures. He often spoke in Italian and loved to sing opera in the mornings. Frank was a great cook and a serious person. Outgoing Joe had lots of friends. Butch was kind and had a good sense of humor. He served as a volunteer with the Livermore Fire Department—he was always the first responder at the fire house since he lived across the street.

In November 1948 the Sweeney Opera House burned down.

The Viale family and friends carried what they could salvage across the street to the west end of Roy Anderson's Motors and continued their business. They returned to a remodeled fireproof building at their previous location in April 1949. Joe continued to work the meat counter, including poultry and fish; Butch and Frank shared the responsibility for the rest.

While at Lake Tahoe on a family vacation, Butch Viale died of a sudden heart attack in 1960 at age 38. The Livermore flag flew at half-mast in his honor during the Requiem Mass held for him at St. Michael's. In July 1962 a group of Livermore merchants presented a new fire bell for a city pumper in recognition of his service.

The Livermore School District purchased the property immediately to the west of the Viale's 20 acres in 1929 and dedicated the new brick Livermore High School in May 1930. Starting in the 1950s the Viales began to sell parts of their acreage to the

district. The baseball diamond is on what was Viale land. The family had built several smaller houses on the property closer to East Avenue. The big house and a smaller one were torn down in 1971. Another small house was moved to Buena Vista.

The Wilson Funeral Home was built on part of the lot. In 2009 the funeral home and the lone residence on the property (the home of Frank and his wife, Adelia) were razed. The Viales sold the last portion of their property to the school district. A new science building was built on the property.

The market was sold to Nicholas and Ida Ratti in August 1961. The building still exists and houses the All Rents business. Louie died in 1961, Frank in 1969, and Joe in 1972. Thanks to Rose Gallagher (Frank's daughter), Jean Moseley (Butch's wife) and Carla Lewis (Butch's daughter) for helping me with this article.

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



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STEVE STEWART

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