

# Livermore Heritage Guild

*Saving Yesterday For Tomorrow*



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## **70 Birthday Candles for Altamont Pass Highway, 50 for Vasco Road**

### ***Altamont Pass Highway – 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary***

The Altamont Highway, I-580 between Greenville Road and Grant Line Road, turned 70 this year. In 1938 its completion was regarded as a watershed event in Bay Area transportation history, on a par with the recently opened Golden Gate Bridge, Bay Bridge, and Caldecott Tunnel. It was considered a pioneer project for other four-lane highways through mountainous areas, especially the Los Gatos-Santa Cruz highway (today's Highway 17).

Until 1938, the two-lane Altamont Highway, then known as Highway 50, was the state highway between Livermore and Tracy. It was narrow, steep, and winding, and could be dangerous. Motorists caught behind sluggish trucks (including the many trucks carrying Central Valley produce to Bay Area canneries) sometimes made fateful decisions in their haste to pass.

The new Altamont Highway was a four-lane divided roadway constructed on a new eight-and-one-half-mile alignment from Greenville Road near Livermore to the Mountain House area. The new highway was a \$1.2-million project requiring 2 million cubic yards of

earth movement, the largest dirt moving job undertaken by the State to that time. The new highway was one mile shorter than the old road, bypassing the town of Altamont and the narrow canyon that the old highway shared with two transcontinental railroad lines. The new road had just 15 curves compared to 60 on the old road; total curvature was reduced from 1,500 to 427 degrees. An island, a rarity in those days, separated the directions of travel. Granfield, Farrar and Carlin of San Francisco was the grading and paving contractor.

Governors rarely visit the Livermore Valley. The opening of the new Altamont Pass highway, however, was worthy of a two-day gubernatorial visit. On August 4, 1938, Governor Frank Merriam presided over a unique "ribbon cutting" ceremony near Greenville, which nearly 1,000 persons attended. Two cowgirls from Livermore, Lois Mulqueeney and Rose Murray, held the ends of a rawhide riata as the governor burned through it with a branding iron. Dignitaries from across northern California were present. Stores closed in Livermore so that the entire community could join the festivities.

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## A message from the President

August 30, 2008

Dear Members,

Thousands of dollars later, all the old galvanized pipe plumbing had been ripped out and completely replaced with copper. Old leaks were gone, and a few new ones that appeared were quickly fixed. After all the mess was cleared, faucets reconnected, and the pressure turned back on, the previous owners of our house knew that their plumbing was good for another 50 years or more. And yet, to all appearances, it looked the same as before the work started. You had to know the house pretty well to understand the magnitude of the change that had taken place, but as the new residents, Loretta and I are pleased and relieved that they invested wisely as they did.

And so it is with our Guild today.

The Old Carnegie Library building looks pretty much the same as it did last month or last year, but some big changes are going on behind the facade in our History Center. Guild Treasurer Dick Lerche has been working his way, box by box, through our collections in the Harp room, organizing, photographing, and making a rough inventory. With much of that in place, he is turning his attention to the records of the Guild itself, to make sure we preserve our own history and conduct ourselves openly and efficiently.

Terry Berry and her interns under the supervision of Hayward Historical Society Collection Manager Heather Farquar, are now taking Dick's overall inventory, protecting and cataloging each piece, and entering the data into our computerized collections database. This kind of internal organizing is part of the plumbing of our Guild and exactly what we need right now so that we can be confident that it is solid and our collections secure well into the next century. Truly, this is Saving Yesterday for Tomorrow!

Not to be ignored, the Duarte Garage is also getting some structural underpinning shored up. If you drove past a few weeks ago and heard loud banging, that was the Historic Preservation Committee commissioner and Guild volunteer Lee Savoy stabilizing a section of the west wall. Thanks Lee!

One of the other important pieces of our 'plumbing' is our strong membership. I would like to encourage each of you to attend this year's Annual General Meeting on September 20 at the Duarte Garage. Of course we will have a great presentation, an excellent dinner (Loretta and I picked it personally) and some fun banjo music in the background, and you can get up close with the restored, and un-restored, fire trucks. But perhaps the most important part of the meeting to me is that this is a great opportunity to give and receive opinions, discuss priorities, and do a little networking for the next year of the Guild. And of course, if you have an interest in helping to fix the plumbing, or work on any other aspect of the Guild, the AGM is a great time for us to talk about it!

*Jeff Kaskey*  
Livermore Heritage Guild President

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Gene Moy drove the Livermore Rodeo Association stagecoach pulled by Joseph S. Concannon's horses to symbolize conveyances of olden days. Livermore Mayor George F. Tubbs rode in the governor's limousine, which was the first car in the procession over the new highway to Tracy.

Befitting the new road's interregional importance, three other dedication events were held, all attended



*Altamont Highway under construction in 1937 (above) looking east towards today's Grant Line Road. The completed highway (left) looking west from Carroll Road junction. Billboards were a common sight along the new highway.*

© California Department of Transportation

by Governor Merriam: a banquet at Hotel Oakland the night before, a breakfast at the Livermore Veterans Memorial Building (where each guest received a bottle of Livermore Valley sauterne), and a luncheon at the Tracy Inn.

"Persons and freight will be carried over and through the smoothly rolling hills at a rapid pace and there will be more safety," the governor told the Oakland banquet. At the dedication ceremony, the governor's remarks were akin to a benediction: "May they move speedily and safely, with the greatest happiness and satisfaction." Joseph Knowland, the *Oakland Tribune* publisher and chairman of the dedication ceremonies, said the highway completion was comparable to the Bay Bridge opening in statewide importance. Assemblyman Arthur Breed, who would become the namesake for a stretch of I-580, lauded the project financing through gasoline tax revenues instead of bonds.

The 1938 Altamont Highway was an isolated four-lane roadway until after World War II. The state highway segment to the west, from Greenville Road to today's Portola Avenue, was not opened as a four-lane highway until 1950. The segment east to Tracy was completed as a four-lane highway in 1954. The last gap in four-lane highway from Oakland to Tracy was closed east of Castro Valley in 1957.



*The opening ceremony for the new highway included Livermore cowgirls Rose Murray (left) and Lois Mulqueeny holding a riata "ribbon" for Governor Merriam to cut.*

© California Department of Transportation

In 1969, westbound I-580 was moved to a new

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## Stories from the Auction

The Livermore Heritage Guild Annual Auction has been a social event and fundraiser for 27 years. Henri and Chet Fankhauser began the Auction, and it is still going strong with Bill Junk and me and many other volunteers. There are many wonderful stories from the auction, and it is time to share some of them.

One donation that comes to mind first, is a pair of the ugliest roosters Chet and I had ever seen. The roosters and two small Asian dishes, all with broken parts, came from an estate in Reno and were being sold on commission. The six- to eight-inch high roosters were so sad and bad that Chet and I teased, "either they're worth nothing or they're worth a lot – nothing in between." There were no markings on the bottoms of the roosters and glaze was flaking off the chest of one and its comb had been broken and badly repaired. The other rooster had parts of his comb missing.

We decided to go ahead and put the roosters in the auction after much discussion over the days we worked at the Garage, preparing box lots and marking donations. When the roosters came up for bid, Chet was unable to get even the minimum bid, which then was, I believe, fifty cents! So the roosters were put back.

We later took the roosters and the dishes to Butterfield and Butterfield, as it was called then, for the free appraisal day. When the appraisers saw them, they asked if we could return after noon as the Asian appraiser would be in then. We waited; he was delighted to see our items and asked if we would sell

them through the auction house. They were quickly added to a catalog for a coming auction, and they sold for \$600! The items were Chinese goods made for export and were highly collectible, even in their rather sad state of repair.

Over the years, we have contacted donors or spoken to them at the time, telling them that we suspect their item might be worth more than they think. Some times the donor does take the item back and other times they leave it at the auction. We do attempt to research the pieces and sometimes stump even antique dealers! It is an educational experience!

As the Auction Team will help with clearing an estate by picking up all the objects that the family doesn't want, there are some times items that are immediately passed on to thrift stores. The donors know this and are just pleased that they are free from making the trip. Sometimes, items that were missed by the family come to the auction team. If we suspect that the family overlooked an item, we call them to ask them to come look at the piece to be sure.



*Henri (left) and Chet Fankhauser began the LHG Auction in 1981. In the 27 years since, the Auction has become a popular community event and an important fund raiser for the Guild.*

By doing this, one donor now has a piece of silver jewelry that came to the auction with costume jewelry belonging to her aunt. It was the only piece of her aunt's jewelry that fit her well. She was happy to have it, and the team was delighted to return it to her.

Another time, patio chairs that once belonged to the donor's grandparents were reluctantly donated. It was a matter of a husband saying, "either get them fixed and use them or donate them." As the team members knew the chairs had meaning to the donor, we found through a Guild member someone who could redo the chairs for a very reasonable price. Yes, the chairs were redone and now grace the owner's front porch!

This summer, Danish guests were due to arrive Friday, the 27th of June, for a two-week visit at our home. Many things I come across while rearranging and cleaning take me off course. I have always been easily distracted. For example, an old photo from the Heritage Guild Auction caught my eye as I was cleaning and sorting.

Some time between Auction '06 and Auction '07, I took home a photo with "Fabiola Hospital, ADD in Oakland, California 1915" written on the back. It also had written on it, "This photo belongs to Vida."

The photo of buildings, done in a snap shot fashion was a rectangle about 10 inches long. The frame, with a pleasant pattern, was coming apart. It is the kind of thing that would undoubtedly get thrown out by a buyer if purchased in a box lot. And besides, I like to find the "right" home for things.

In May 2007, I contacted the photo archives at Oakland Museum to see if they wanted the photo and heard nothing from them. I often "chased" the photo around when sorting and cleaning, thinking I ought to contact the museum again.

On June 25, 2008, I looked at the picture as it surfaced again from one of my piles...oh, that's *files*. In the middle of my busy work, it suddenly came to me to contact L-AGS and see if anyone had a relative born there or knew of a chat room or bulletin board to post the picture in hopes of finding a home for it.

Within hours of sending an email, there came seven responses, with

different ideas or suggestions. Bev Ales offered to find the correct person to talk with at the Oakland Museum. Others suggested sites where lost photos can be posted. Another person sent a list of people who had died in Fabiola Hospital. John Shirley responded saying he would like to see the photo as his mother took her nurse's training at Fabiola Hospital.

Yet another message said, "My mother was born at Fabiola Hospital on 25 June 1922. Today would have been her birthday! I would love to have the photo. Thanks, Janet Nadol"

Janet came from Lafayette to get the picture the next day. We were both quite touched by the fact that the picture was put on the L-AGS email on her mother's birthday. Had it been put out to L-AGS in spring of 2007, Janet might not have seen it; she joined L-AGS in the spring of this year.

Janet has already begun research on the Fabiola Hospital. She has sent John Shirley a scan so he can see where his mother did her nurse's training.

As Janet and I shared a day or so after she was here, this story has only just begun. We hope the person who donated the photo can tell us who Vida is – the picture belonged to her, remember?

At present, an Auction Team member is attempting to find a museum or a collector of things Norwegian. Some small, wooden items, including a spoon from the late 1800s were donated to the auction. As the one piece, espe-

cially, is so old, we hope to find the "perfect home" for it.

Hope these stories tempt you to come and help with auction preparation, which goes on all year, or to work the auction in May of 2009. See you there!

-By Anna Siig

### How well do you know your town?

One hundred and twenty years ago the four major roadways leading out of town were North Avenue, West Avenue, South Avenue and East Avenue. What happened to the first three?

Where was Broad Street? What do you know about Livermore's first "rapid transit" system? How were chimneys inspected for possible damage after the 1906 earthquake?

You will find the answers to these questions and many other facts about Livermore by enrolling in Gary Drummond's "Livermore Glimpses" class. The four two-hour lecture sessions begin October 9 at 7 PM. Dazzle your friends and neighbors with the facts you'll learn.

Registrations are taken at the Ed Rundstron Adult Education Center at 1401 Almond Avenue.

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alignment to the north of the 1938 highway. The 1938 highway was re-built into today's eastbound I-580.

**Vasco Road – 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

The road that is today known as Vasco Road went by four names until 1958: it was “Vasco Road” north of U.S. 50 (now I-580), “Washington Avenue” from U.S. 50 to the Southern Pacific tracks (now inactive), “Taylor Lane” from the Western Pacific tracks (now Union Pacific) to East Avenue, and “Las Positas Avenue” (likely named for the nearby springs that were a landmark on Robert Livermore's Mexican land grant maps) from East Avenue to Tesla Road.

In 1957, the County of Alameda approved a \$316,000 project to widen the new Vasco Road and construct the missing link between the railroad tracks. On August 1, 1958, the Livermore Chamber of Commerce sponsored a nuclear-powered ribbon cutting, a unique dedication ceremony that was befitting an access road to a nuclear laboratory.

Newspapers touted the event with headlines such as “First Time in History: Nuclear Device Opens New Highway Today.” Newspaper articles explained that Lawrence Livermore Laboratory employees made ordinary table salt radioactive at the Lab's reactor. The radiation from the salt closed the circuit in an electronic amplifier system, which in turn exploded black powder, thereby cutting the ribbon across Vasco

Road. County Supervisor Chester Stanley (the namesake of today's Stanley Boulevard) had the honor of initiating the process when he waved a wand containing the radioactive salt near the electronic instrument.

Laboratory director Dr. Edward Teller was an enthusiastic backer of the special dedication ceremony, which was overseen by Lab research director Duane Sewell. Dr. Teller was the only speaker at the luncheon following the event.

Completion of Vasco Road was a major advance for the Livermore Valley's road network. Until 1958, commuters to the Lab from the west had to traverse downtown Livermore to take East Avenue. Just four roads in the entire Livermore Valley crossed the railroad tracks: L Street, Livermore Avenue, Junction Avenue, and what is now Greenville Road. The Valley's only traffic signal was located at 1<sup>st</sup> and L Streets.

The new Vasco Road also opened eastern Livermore to industrial development. The first major project was the Armco steel pipe plant that opened in 1959 (now Harris Rebar).

The next major advances to Vasco Road occurred in the mid-1960s when the cloverleaf interchange with I-580 opened and in the late 1980s when the road was widened between East Avenue and I-580 and the railroad overpass was constructed.

*-By Jason A. Bezis*

## AGM Save the Date

On Saturday, September 20, 2008, plan on attending the Livermore Heritage Guild Annual General Meeting (AGM) and dinner at the Duarte Garage between 6 and 9 PM! This is the 35th anniversary year for the Guild. We have a special photo slide presentation of Livermore from bygone years created by John Sarboraria.

Join us for lively banjo music, a catered meal, and the election of next year's officers. See the flyer in this newsletter to RSVP.

Cost will be \$20 per person. The AGM is a chance to reconnect with other members who believe that “Saving Yesterday for Tomorrow” is worthwhile. Come celebrate!!!

If you'd like to help with the event, we are still looking for volunteers to set up, serve food and drinks and tear down at the event. Please e-mail or call Jeff Kaskey for information or to volunteer (jkaskey@yahoo.com; 510-816-9542).

## Calendar

**LHG Board Meeting**, Wednesday, September 3, 7 pm. Carnegie Building, Third and J Streets, downstairs. All welcome

**History Talk**. No talk in September. Come to the AGM.

**Annual General Meeting and Dinner**, Saturday, September 20, 6 pm at the Duarte Garage. John Sarboraria will give a slide presentation from his collection of old Livermore photographs.

**Duarte Garage Open**. No Sunday open house. Come to the AGM.

**LHG Board Meeting**, Wednesday, October 1, 7 pm. Carnegie Building, Third and J Streets, downstairs. All welcome.

**History Talk**, Wednesday, October 15, 7:30 pm. Dick Finn will present "Dan Berry Family Saloon." Doors open at 7 pm. Livermore Civic Center Library, 1188 S. Livermore Avenue. Light refreshments.

**Duarte Garage Open** Sunday, October 19, 10-2 pm. On the Old Lincoln Highway at the corner of Portola and L Streets.

**Newsletter Mailing**, Saturday, October 25, 11:30. Carnegie Building, Third and J Streets. Help get the newsletter ready for mailing. Call Maxine at 925-422-6539 or just drop in.

**LHG Board Meeting**, Wednesday November 5, 7 pm. Carnegie Building, Third and J Streets, downstairs. All welcome

## News Notes

✦ **The Early Ford V-8 group** along with members of the Altamont Cruisers made their lunch stop at the Duarte Garage in August. Early Fords include models that predate 1953. About 16 vehicles stopped at the Garage. Bill Junk had his 1932 roadster out and Ed Rominger stopped by with his 1937 Ford/Van Pelt pumper fire truck. *(from Susan Junk)*

✦ **The Dutro House**, which Guild members helped save from demolition, has been restored and is up for sale. It's at the corner of P and Olivina Streets. According to sales publicity:

"This home was originally built in 1924, by architect Samuel Bothwell. Its original location was 292 L Street. The home has been moved to its new location but will keep many of its original historical features, along with giving you a chance to have a historic Livermore home gone GREEN! 1,565 square feet, 2 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, original built-ins and woodwork."

✦ **Thank you to Accurate Auto Care** on First Street in Livermore who donated time to make repairs to the History Mobile. The Guild appreciates their help.

✦ **The LHG Oral History Committee** is looking for volunteers to help with recording oral histories and suggestions for long-time Livermore residents to interview. Ideas? Contact Neal Cavanaugh at nealfcavanaugh@sbcglobal.net.

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*The Livermore Heritage Guild newsletter is published six times per year. Contact the newsletter editor with comments or suggestions for articles.*

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**Masthead Photo:** Looking east on First Street in Livermore, circa 1920.

## Volunteers "Discover" Wallie's Place Poster



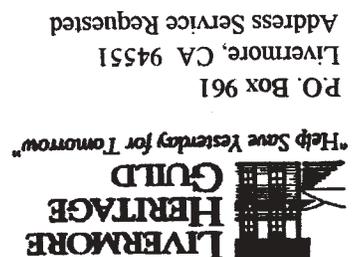
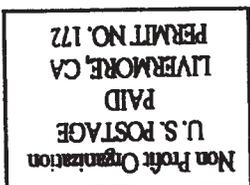
*From Early Livermore: "Wallie's Place on First Street near the flagpole was one of 22 saloons in Livermore at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Farm hands, who came in on Saturday night for a bath, a shave, and a beer, kept Wallie Thomas busy dispensing beer brewed by the Livermore Brewery."*

This early-1900s Wallie's Place poster surfaced during the rehousing of items in LHG collections. Such "discoveries" occur daily and are among the many pleasures of volunteering here at the History Center. Rehousing activities will continue as a part of an ongoing effort to protect our priceless collection of Livermore gems. Training is available for volunteers.

If you're interested in participating in the archival rehousing project, please contact Terry Berry at [terry@berry.org](mailto:terry@berry.org) or 925-200-9807.

Wondering how else you might help? Email us at [lhg@lhg.org](mailto:lhg@lhg.org), call us at 925-449-9927, or better yet, COME ON IN! We welcome you to join us in "saving yesterday for tomorrow."

*-Lydia Carpenter, Office Manager*



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