



THE LIVERMORE COLLEGE
by Larry Mauch

In 1869, when William Mendenhall laid out the town of Livermore, he donated land for a train depot, public school, two churches and a park. The public school taught only the lower grades, so in 1870 he donated six acres and offered financial assistance to the extent of \$5000 for a school of higher learning to Rev. and Mrs. W.B.Kingsbury (Mrs. Kingsbury was already a successful teacher) who founded the Livermore College.

With the addition of prepaid tuition for pupils, sufficient funds were raised to build a three story building on what later became College Ave., opposite "O" Street. Although it was called a college, it really substituted for our present day high school, which was not established in Livermore until the early 1890's. Attended by local students, as well as students from many of the surrounding towns, rooming and boarding facilities were a part of the building as well as classrooms.

The growing number of students resulted in expansion the first several years, but by the end of 1874, the Rev. and Mrs. Kingsbury did not have the necessary capital to expand any further. So in December of that year, Professor James Dale Smith purchased the college for \$5000 and assumed the outstanding debt.

Born in 1845 in Scotland, Professor Smith came to Benicia, California in 1848 with his parents. His father was a mechanic employed with the Pacific Steamship Company and his mother took in boarders in the family home. In 1850, they moved to an area that was about a 1/4 mile south of the current town of Danville. When his parents died in 1864, two of his parents' friends offered to finance his education: William Lynch of San Ramon and Hiram Bailey of Livermore. As Mr. Lynch offered first, he accepted his offer of \$2000 with a promise to repay in the future.

In 1867, Professor Smith graduated from McClure's Military Academy in Oakland where he also taught the following year. In 1871 and 1872, he was a teacher at the San Leandro public school and in 1873 and 1874, taught at Washington College in Irvington.

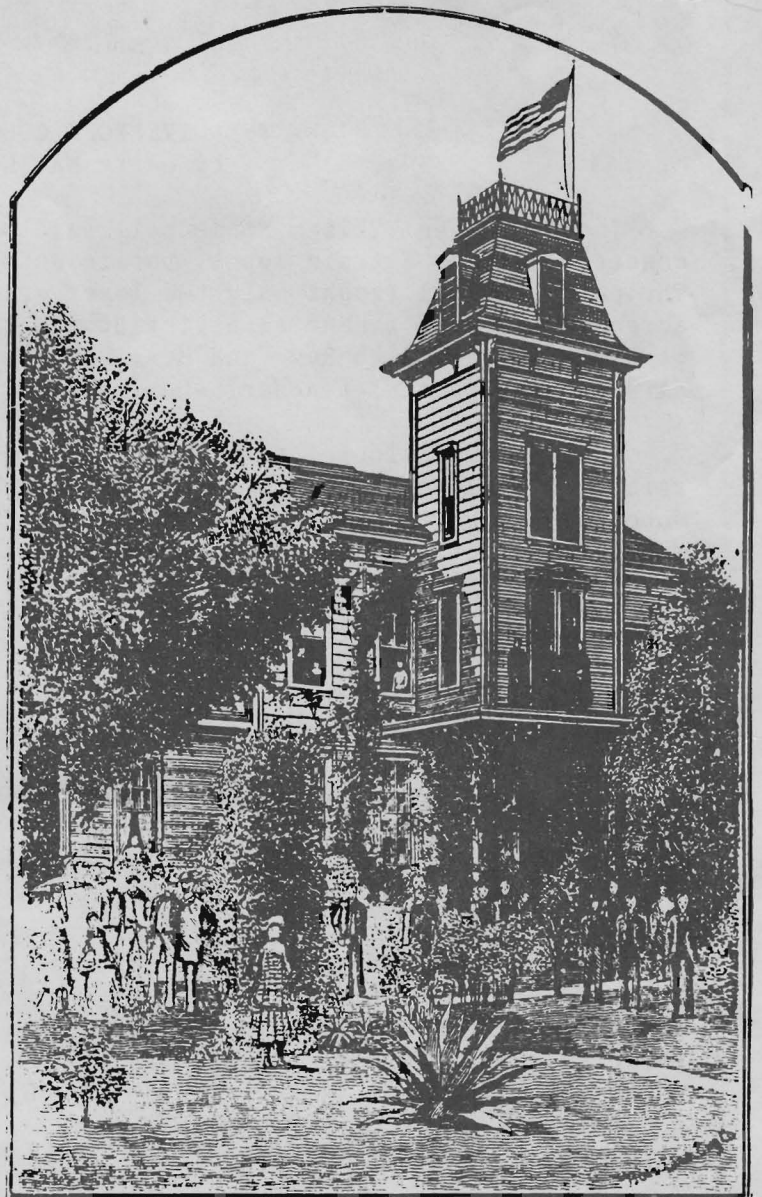
When he purchased the Livermore College, several students transferred from the Washington College to Livermore requiring that the college be expanded further (several smaller buildings were added to the grounds). The college averaged 50 students per year during it's existence. (The 1874 Livermore public school statistics showed 212 children between five and seventeen years old living in Livermore with an additional 109 children under five years old). Besides the regular courses, training was added to prepare young men and women to teach in the public schools as well as instrumental and vocal classes.

The college had a baseball team called the Stars, which beat the Washington Corners club 52 to 12 in 1875. The game was played at the Livermore Baseball Club grounds which was referred to in the Livermore Enterprise as "no doubt one of the best base-ball grounds in the state".

Many of the college's graduates later became teachers in the public schools, as well as one who became governor (George Pardee) and one a judge (Lincoln S. Church). William Mendenhall's daughter attended the college as did J.O. McKown, who later owned the local drug store for many years.

With the opening of the Livermore High School and the death of his wife, Professor Smith shut down the college in 1895. The building and grounds were obtained by Dr. Robertson for the Livermore Sanitarium, which used it for ten years before it finally became the John McGlinchey home in 1908. (John McGlinchey remodeled the main building, changing it from forty-eight rooms to twenty-four rooms). A severe fire in 1931 caused the building to finally be torn down.

In October of 1924, the Professor was interviewed by the Oakland Tribune at the Masonic home in Decoto, where he was living. Above his bed was the flag that flew over the old Livermore College. The article remarked how many of his pupils remembered him fondly and still kept in touch with their former teacher. In 1929, Professor James Dale Smith passed away.



Sketch from 1887 booklet
Semi Tropical Livermore