

Livermore Heritage Guild

Saving Yesterday For Tomorrow

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Agua Puerca/Oak Spring: Forgotten Valley Landmark



In the torrid summer heat of the Livermore Valley, water is essential to life. Before construction of the State Water Project's Lake Del Valle and South Bay Aqueduct in the 1960s, arroyos usually ran dry. Springs and wells were crucial to survival, especially during the Mexican land grant era of the 1830s and '40s.

Robert Livermore's (1799-1858) and José Noriega's grant, Rancho Las Positas, was named for the numerous natural springs on their large parcel. The water that they provided, especially during dry months, was essential to sustaining their large cattle herds and to meeting domestic needs. When the Ssaoam Ohlone Native Americans inhabited the region, tule elk, deer and other wildlife no doubt flocked around these oases. (Dublin was founded near Alamilla Spring, where Rancho San Ramon grantee José Maria Amador lived.)

Robert Livermore settled in the 1830s in Arroyo Las Positas canyon, between what are now North Livermore Ave. and Portola Ave. His son Robert Livermore, Jr. (1840-86) eventually settled up-creek at springs near what is now Springtown. This article is the story of the Valley's other prominent spring, once a major landmark, but now forgotten.

The "Agua Puerca" spring, later known as "Oak Spring" *Continued on p. 5*

This *diseño* (hand-drawn map) of Rancho Las Positas, the Mexican land grant claimed by Robert Livermore and José Noriega, is one of the earliest extant depictions of the Livermore Valley. Note "Aguas Puercas" in the lower part. From Land Case 322 U.S. District Court, California, Northern District, page 600; land case map D-652 (Bancroft Library, U.C. Berkeley).

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Guild's Trio of Retired Local Fire Trucks Graces Rodeo Parade



Perhaps for the first time, the Livermore Rodeo Parade on June 11th featured a trio of retired Livermore Fire Department vehicles, now being conserved by the LHG. The photo above shows the procession: the 1919 Ford Model T, followed by the 1920 Seagrave and 1944 Mack fire engines.

The Seagrave, the middle vehicle above and shown separately at right, won first place in the "Antique Vehicles" category. LHG volunteers have been restoring it since 2008; it recently started moving under its own power. The Model T won third place. Parade weather was unusu-

ally cool, making the old-fashioned clothing worn by many vehicle occupants more comfortable. Irv Stowers, driver of the Seagrave in the parade

(see photo below), will speak about the restoration project at the LHG annual meeting on Sept. 24th. He wrote about it in LHG's July/Aug. 2010 newsletter.



Photos by Bill Nade, eLivermore.com

LHG Calendar

SUNDAY, AUGUST 21ST, Duarte Garage Open from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on "old" Lincoln Highway, Portola Ave. at L St. (No "open garage day" in Sept.)

SATURDAY, AUGUST 27TH, Yard Sale at the "Sort 'n Store," 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., 1960's library at South Livermore and Pacific Avenues. We will be selling off a collection of items that didn't make it to the last auction, overflow, and stuff that just couldn't wait until next year's auction. In a bit of a unique twist for a yard sale, the pricing will be set to "make us a donation." Sale workers will ask for donations and

shoppers will give what they think is fair, and what we hope is generous, with perhaps a bit of cajoling from the volunteers working the sale. Come pick through our eclectic mix. ("Sort n' Store" is the Guild's informal name for the place where it sorts and stores annual auction donations.).

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 24TH, LHG Annual Dinner & General Meeting, Duarte Garage. Doors open at 5:30 p.m., dinner at 6 p.m. Guild member **Irv Stowers** will speak about the 1920 **Seagrave fire engine restoration project**. Tickets for the event will be available at the History Center, 2155 Third St., beginning in late August (generally open Wed. -Sun. 11:30 a.m.-4 p.m., open late on Thurs. until 8 p.m.). Menu and price to be announced. Seating is limited, buy your tickets early. No host bar. Dress is casual.

What a great few months we have had. I hope you had a chance to drop in to one of the many local events through May and June where local heritage has been honored, whether it was our Carnegie Building's centennial, the light bulb's 110th birthday, or ... oh wait, let's get into these one at a time.

Working backwards in time, the Light Bulb Celebration was recent enough that I can still feel its glow. Or maybe that's just from all of the birthday cake I ate, but in any case it was exciting to be among the hundreds of people packed into and around L.P.F.D. Station No. 6 on East Ave. to honor the "WORLD'S LONGEST BURNING LIGHTBULB" as it reached the 110-year mark. Sure, you can drop by to see it any time at the fire station or check out its webcam ("Bulb-cam"), but being in the company of fellow revelers let us have lots of conversations about what changes the world has seen since the bulb was first switched on in 1901. And all of the things we know of that seem much less fragile, yet have not lasted nearly as long. Thanks go to many people for making this event possible, so I will point to the Centennial Light Bulb Committee and hope that you had a chance to meet with individual members if you made it to the event. They were the ones looking a little tired, but still with a warm glow around them.

Steve Bunn brought his light bulb collection, which included a cousin of our Shelby bulb. Party attendees could have their picture taken holding the glowing bulb as they sat under its relative. The bulb and our local firefighters have also been memorialized in some children's books, so authors Janet Nolan and Juliette Goodrich signed and sold their books featuring our celebrated bulb at the event. Being at a fire station, you can bet that your Heritage Guild brought all of our restored fire apparatus to be there on display. From the hand-pulled hose cart through our Model T fire car, 1920 Seagrave and 1944 Mack, they were a rolling timeline of changes that the light bulb has overseen. Consider that the day the Seagrave was purchased by the City of Livermore, the light bulb would have been already considered old. All of the vehicles made it there under their own power. Besides being a tribute to our incredible band of historic fire engine mechanics (that's the vehicles that are historic, not necessarily the mechanics), I am thinking that was easier since they were probably still warm from each running in the Rodeo Parade the week before (see p. 2).

The movie "A Century Of Light" about our light bulb was screened for its world premiere at the Vine Cinema & Alehouse the night before the Bulb's birthday party. They sold the place out, and the Vine added two additional screenings to slake the thirst of a demanding public. We have copies of the documentary for sale at the Carnegie Building. It features some of your favorite locals talking about their light bulb experiences and encounters. By now I'm not sure if the bulb is really still working, or maybe all of the attention is making it blush.

On May 28th was the annual fundraising Auction at the Duarte Garage and Lincoln Highway Museum. The Auction crew had sifted through the donated treasures to make for another exciting evening of lively bidding with master auctioneer Lynn Owens calling the action. The kitchen team made sure the bidders were well fed and in a spirit to buy. By the end of the evening we had welcomed over 100 guests, exhausted a team of runners, sold nearly everything we had brought and earned a little over \$6,000 to keep the Guild running. Thanks to everyone for their contributions, work and participation. I can't mention the Auction without noting that Lynn Owens, auctioneer extraordinaire and a one-man force of nature, is facing some challenging medical issues, so we wish a full recovery for him and strength for his wife Linda and friends and family.

A mere two weeks before the Auction we were delighted to host those of you who came out on a brisk May day to enjoy our Carnegie Centennial Art & History Fair, celebrating the Carnegie Building's 100th anniversary. We had displays showcasing the Carnegie Library's history, historic maps and booths from our Historymobile crew and the Carnegie State Vehicular Recreation Area, which is also the caretaker of the remains of the Carnegie mines and brickworks. A few in 1911-era apparel came out (see photo). L.A.A. artists also showed their work making it a very festive, if rather chilly, celebration. Many thanks to Alicia Eltgroth who ran the event and her team of volunteers.



Livermore Vice Mayor John Marchand, Jeff Kaskey and Loretta Kaskey at Carnegie Building Centennial Fair.

Jeff Kaskey

Photos Then & Now: Guild Begins Partnership With "Historypin"

The ubiquity of cameras may have devalued modern photos to something less than the proverbial "1000 words," but we often turn to historic images for an understanding of past events and places. We benefit enormously from being able to access modern photos of the world nearly instantly using tools like Google Maps and Street View. Imagine the value to historians and the intellectually curious if they were able to "roll the time machine back" while looking at that street view. Being able to see earlier streetscapes would be fun and interesting, and help us create a context for our stories of the past.

And so, of course, there are people working on just that. The Livermore Heritage Guild has started partnering with the non-profit Historypin.com organization to allow exploration into the past. Historypin, based in London with a San Francisco office, links a current Google Street View image to historical photos of the same location, so you can slide back in time. They just launched this July (and your President attended the San Francisco launch event) so things are still a bit fluid, but this looks like a great way to engage more people with Livermore's history.

The website allows visitors to set a time period of interest from 1840 to the present, select an area, and optionally select a topic such as schools or transportation. The map flies to your chosen location and photos of interest are "pinned" to the map. A few more clicks and you can fade the historic photo in and out over the modern street view. You can see here a nice shot of the Carnegie Library with a picture of H. P. Anderson with his horse Dolly Gray in front of the same building in 1911 being faded in over top. Just five Livermore photos are on the site at the moment (e.g., Inman school, "Joesville").

If you are interested in looking through our collection and matching places to our historic shots, contact us in any of the generally accepted modern ways (e-mail, phone, visit, pigeon). With our archive of historic photos, it should be possible to pull together a useful vision of Livermore's historic downtown, for example.



Photos of Carnegie Library Building - 1911 superimposed over 2011.

There will be questions about retaining the Guild's rights to these photos and this might be a good time for a refresher on the way the Guild deals with historic photos in general.

Often the copyright status of a photo in the collection is not known. Simply because someone donated the photo does not insure that the photographer has granted any specific permissions. When one buys an image from our collection, one is not paying for the photo, but rather are charged a nominal service fee that helps reimburse the conservation and archiving work the Guild does to keep the photos for future generations (donations welcome!).

The Guild's release form states that it does not vouch for the copyright status of the photo and that each user is responsible for assessing rights for

their intended use. In some cases, historic photos are beyond their copyright protected dates. With few exceptions, items published before 1925 are all in the public domain. Unpublished or unregistered items follow a more complex formula, but roughly the same date is a good starting guess. *-by Jeff Kaskey*

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Agua Puerca Spring *(Cont'd from Page 1)*

(1880s through 1910s) and “Willow Spring” (1920s), is located north of what is today Tesla Road (opposite the Wenté Vineyards “estate winery”), between Vasco Road and Buena Vista Avenue. “Agua puerca” translates from Spanish as “muddy water,” probably because the spring water mixed with dirt as it pooled. Today its water is pumped into tanks operated by the California Water Service, a private water utility. The spring itself has been reduced to an anonymous sump within a vineyard. A residential subdivision is under construction nearby.

As the *diseños* (hand-drawn maps) of Rancho Las Positas depict, Agua Puerca was a major Valley landmark in the Mexican land grant era. The map on the front page shows “Aguas Puercas” near the hills in the southeastern portion of the valley, north of “Arroyo Mocho.” (I-580 from Portola Ave. to First St. now runs through “Cañada de Las Pocitas.”) Another Las Positas *diseño* (see below) depicts the spring as “Ojito de Agua” (little eye of water).

The “Ojito de Agua” is mentioned in the litigation concerning title to the Rancho Las Positas grant. The *Oakland Tribune* of July 3, 1921 says that Henry C. Smith, the alcalde (mayor) at Mission San Jose, provided



testimony about the location of Robert Livermore's rodeo of 1849 in relation to the spring. Smith testified that nearly 16,000 cattle were gathered from the “Sierra de Buenos Ayres” (Altamont) and “Las Cuevas” (Brushy Peak) areas “to within about half a mile from the Ojita de Agua.” Smith said that the rodeo grounds “were located about three-quarters of a mile northwest from Ojita de Agua and about two and a half miles southeast from the Livermore casa and occupied 100 acres.”

Agua Puerca may be where the Lt. Col. Juan de Anza expedition spent the night of April 4-5, 1776. Pedro Font noted in his diary that they crossed the Altamont region and “halted upon a small height next to a hollow in which a little water was found.” (Alan K. Brown translation, p. 324). Anza wrote in his diary, “[W]e halted for the night on the same hills, at the first water and firewood which we found.” (Web de Anza Project, U. of Oregon.) The July 15, 1949 *Herald* surmised that the Anza campsite was “Oak Spring, now the H.L. Wenté home.”

José Livermore, an adopted son of Robert Liver-

more and Josefa Higuera, settled at Agua Puerca in the mid-1850s with his wife Juana Bernal. Born José Altamirano in the late 1820s, the Livermores adopted him after he was orphaned, a common practice in Mexican California. He married Juana Bernal, a daughter of Augustin Bernal (a grantee of Rancho Valle de San Jose, which included today's western Livermore and most of Pleasanton).

Carpenter Hiram Bailey moved from Contra Costa County to build José Livermore's house in 1855, according to Wood's *History of Alameda County* (1883). As Anne Homan explains in *Historic Livermore*, Bailey remained in Livermore for the rest of his life, marrying José's step-sister Casimira and representing the area on the Alameda County Board of Supervisors and as a state assemblyman (1887-89).



1857 Official Map of Alameda County

The first official map of Alameda County in 1857 shows “J. Livermore” along the “Corral (sic) Hollow Pass” road. It is among the few landmarks depicted in the Livermore Valley. In her *Las Positas* book, Janet Newton referred to José Livermore and Agua Puerca, but confused his home with N.G. Patterson's on what is now Wenté St. (pp. 130, 140). In 1865, a petition for a new road to Patterson Pass (No. 695) used “José Livermore's house (commonly called agua puerca)” as a reference point. “Joseph Livermore” was named in the 1865 condemnation proceedings for Western Pacific Railroad right-of-way (opened in 1869).

José Livermore was a purveyor of horses and beef to early settlers. In his diary, Corral Hollow miner and sheep rancher Edward Carrell wrote in 1857 of frequently visiting “Jo Livermore's” “to get a Beef.” On August 26, 1858, he wrote that a “Dick Sears got his horses” there. After Robert Livermore died (1858), José was named estate administrator. In the 1860 census, another family's children lived with José's.

The José Livermore family apparently left the Agua Puerca ranch in the late 1860s. Perhaps squatting grain farmers, protracted litigation over title to his father's land grant and the arrival of the railroad were too much for them to bear. In the 1870 census, José, Juana and five children were San Jose residents. The *San Jose & Santa Clara County Directory, 1871-72* lists “Jose Livermore, farmer, San Jose.”

A dependable water source, “Agua puerca” likely had a pioneering role in two major agricultural industries in the Livermore Valley: grain growing and viticulture. Wood's *History* says that in the early 1850s, “Every-body in the

valley was interested in stock-raising, and no other industry was in operation, nor hardly thought of. In the year 1856, however, the first blow toward the complete revolution of the industrial interests of the district was struck. Joseph Livermore had some time previously fenced a hundred-and-sixty-acre field on the Pocitas Grant, including a portion of the ranch now owned by Almon Weymouth, and that year sowed the same to wheat. The was the first field of grain ever raised in the Livermore Valley." (p. 464). By the late 1860s, homesteaders rushed in to claim public and rancho lands and planted most of the Valley in wheat, barley and other grains.

Elmer Still's timeline of local history, published in the *Livermore Herald* in the 1930s, says that the Valley's first imported vineyard was planted on the "Jose Livermore/Montgomery place" in 1872. This anticipated the local viticultural boom by a decade; the 1880s were when grapevines took over thousands of acres of grain fields.

Anton Bardellini is believed to have planted the 1872 imported vineyard. The 1874 official map of Alameda County says that "A. Bardalliro" (likely a misspelling of Bardellini) owned or occupied the 160 acres where Agua Puerca is. The map depicts a "Spring" and "Corral."

Agua Puerca spring is located in the S.W. quarter of Section 14, T.3S., R.2E., Mt. Diablo Base & Median System. Today's Tesla Rd. is at bottom. 1874 Alameda County official map (G.F. Allardt).



By 1883, the J.A. Robinson family occupied José Livermore's former house, following an extensive renovation in 1882. On February 28, 1883, the two-story dwelling burned to the ground, but workers were able to evacuate most of its contents (*Oakland Tribune*, March 2, 1883).

In 1888, a syndicate (W.P. Bartlett, J.D. Smith, Dr. W.S. Taylor, Geo. Beck, G. W. Comegys, P. McKeany, C.J. Stevens estate) bought the Robinson place, which it planned to sub-divide. W.P. Bartlett's 1889 bird's eye rendering of Livermore includes an inset depicting "OAK SPRING VINEYARD – 100 ACRES IN VINES." In 1890, the *Herald* reported construction of cottages and planting of vineyards and orchards on Oak Spring tract parcels. A.T. Hatch, a prominent Solano County orchardist, planted almond trees in 1887, J.D. Smith acquired 23 acres in 1890,

which he planted in almonds, prunes and apricots. In 1889, the *Echo* reported coyotes "depredating" Oak Spring tract.



"Oak Spring Vineyard" looking northwesterly in 1889

Baker's *Past and Present of Alameda County, California* (Volume II, 1914) referred to the "famous Oak Spring Vineyard ... which has been noted for many years because of the fine spring which afforded a watering place for the many travelers who went from San Jose to Stockton, from Stockton to Oakland, etc., on horseback." (pp. 560-61).

The 1891 *Directory of the Grape Growers and Wine Makers of California* says that A. Montgomery owned Oak Spring Vineyard. It reported 95 acres in grapes: 65 in wine grapes (mostly Zinfandel), 20 in table grapes and 10 in raisin grapes. The vineyard produced 85 tons in 1889, all of which were sold to winemakers. The *Livermore Herald* reported in November 1888 that some of the raisins were shipped to Chicago that year, "[t]he first carload of dried grapes ever shipped from Livermore valley."

In 1903, a D.C. McNally occupied the Oak Spring area when fire destroyed a barn (60 tons of hay lost), which he quickly replaced. In November 1912, the large oak tree that was the spring's namesake fell. In June 1913, Carl Heinrich Wentz (1851-1934) bought from Elizabeth Rogers of San Francisco the 160-acre Oak Spring Vineyard parcel, across Tesla Road (then "Vineyard Ave.") from his winery.

The *Herald* of November 15, 1913 ran a lengthy article about Oak Spring: "The spring itself is very remarkable from the fact that it is flowing strongly after two dry seasons in which all the streams, most of the springs and many wells in the valley have gone completely dry ... it was one of the pioneer watering places and during the early days before the country was fenced thousands of head of cattle were watered there." The article says that the spring had filled in: "[U]ntil recent years only a little marshy ground indicated the presence of an underground supply and the original spring was covered by a portion of the ranch house ... C.H. Wentz, who recently acquired the property, put a force of men at work dismantling the build-

ing and excavating to clear the old spring. He has succeeded beyond all expectations and will soon have a fine supply of water ... Mr. Wenté's men dug a sump about twelve feet square above the old spring and the water rushed in strong enough to stop the men from working, and two wine pumps throwing 1500 and 2000 gallons an hour, respectively, failed to lower it perceptibly ...

Strange to relate, dozens of small fish, resembling minnows, are swimming in the pool ... the workmen were greatly surprised when they discovered them in excavating." Wenté planned to use the water to irrigate alfalfa.

"[S]howing his confidence in the spineless cactus as cattle and hog feed," Wenté planted ten acres at Oak Spring farm (*Herald*, August 2, 1913). Renowned botanist Luther Burbank of Santa Rosa developed the plant and grew it on his Livermore Valley farms, sparking a short-lived spineless cactus boom here. In March 1914, Wenté planted 35 acres to wine grapes at Oak Spring.

Until 1958, the section of today's Vasco Road between Tesla Rd. and East Ave. was "Las Positas Avenue," possibly named for the nearby Agua Puerca/Oak Spring.

Although the spring itself is ancient, only recently did geologists identify the fault that created it. In 1975, Darrell G. Herd of the U.S. Geological Survey discovered the Las Positas Fault Zone, which runs northeast-southwest along the hills behind Sandia National Laboratory where Vasco Road terminates. Herd explained in a 1977 U.S.G.S. report, "Plant growth is apparently affected by impoundment of ground water south of a northeast-trending fault break. The vegetation south of the fault remains verdant throughout the year owing to near-surface ground water." (p. 7). During the earthquake of January 24, 1980, Mrs. Shirley Volkman, a rancher nearby on Vasco Rd., heard the sloshing of underground water.

Most of the half-square mile around Agua Puerca remained planted in grapevines until the city's adoption

of the South Livermore Valley Specific Plan in the late 1990s (Sub-area No. 2). Charlotte Way was extended south of East Ave. to Vasco Rd. The Dunsmuir development was the first carved out of the vines near East Ave. in 2000. "Vintage" (Signature Homes) is now under construction near the spring.

Today Agua Puerca spring is a sump, surrounded by a chain link fence topped with barbed wire, amidst a vineyard. Eight water storage tanks are nearby. The area's rich history was not acknowledged when the city and county approved nearby developments. Although it is too late to memorialize the site's people and places in street names, a historical landmark designation and monument might be appropriate. -by Jason A. Bezis



Above: View of Agua Puerca spring in July 2011, looking southeast. **Below:** View of spring (surrounded by chain link fence in front of tanks) looking northeast in July 2011.



Photos by Jason Bezis, July 21, 2011.

Photo by Bill Nole (eLivermore.com)



Above: The Carnegie Building Centennial Art & History Fair was held on May 14th. Isabel Nolte, wife of Don Nolte (the last head librarian at the Carnegie Building) and One Big Family author, and Pat Hoening, creator of the Carnegie Centennial Quilt, posed in front of the quilt, which Jean Lerche won in a raffle. Right: Four days later (May 18), a staging area for Stage 4 of the 2011 Tour of California bicycle race (Livermore to San Jose) was in front of the History Center, which opened early for visitors. The Guild's Model T transported the mayor to open the race.

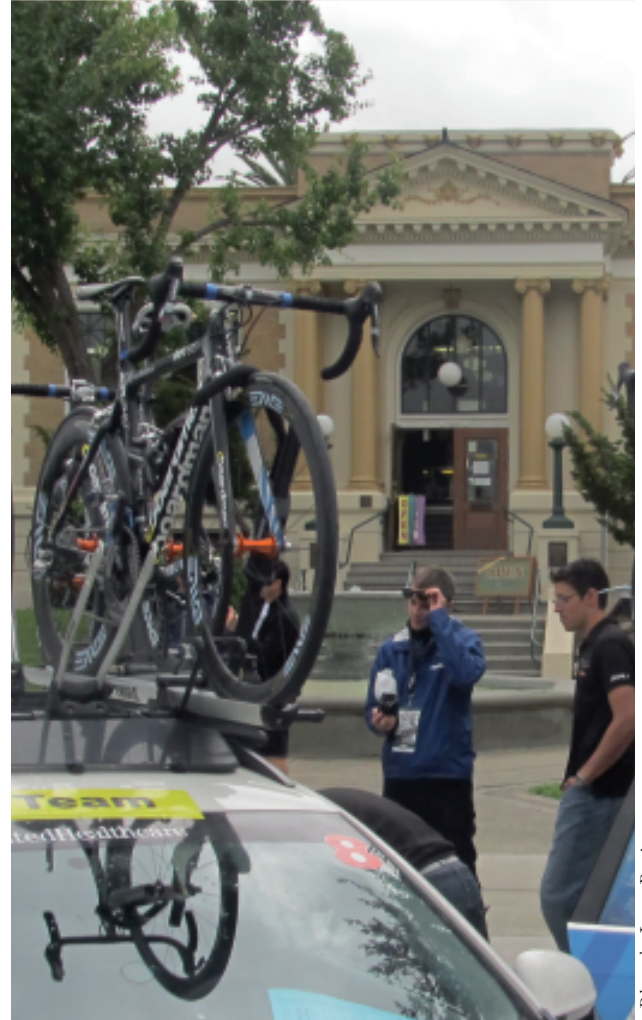


Photo by Jason Bexis

The Livermore Heritage Guild History Center is located in the historic 1911 Carnegie Library building at 2155 Third Street. History Center hours generally are Wednesday through Sunday, 11:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Phone: (925) 449-9927. Free admission.

Annual membership dues are: Individual \$25.00, Family \$35.00, Senior (age 62+) \$15.00, Student \$15.00, Sponsor \$75.00 and Patron \$150.00. Life (Individual) \$500.00 and Business \$300.00 memberships are also available. Please make checks payable to "LHG." Mail to P.O. Box 961, Livermore, CA 94551.

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