

Do You Remember?

By Anne Homan
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Aunt Lizzie Oliver

The Livermore-Amador Symphony recently held an estate sale. One of the items sold was a photograph portrait of "Aunt Lizzie." I understand that many people at the sale did not know of her.

On his original 1869 plot map of the town of Livermore, William M. Mendenhall named Lizzie Street (now South Livermore Avenue) in honor of his oldest daughter, who was 17 years old at the time. Another Lizzie, Lizzie Oliver, came to Livermore about 1871. She built a little white cottage at the northeast corner of Second and Lizzie, where Joan Boer imagined that "she watched the world go by from her porch rocker." Before old age confined her to the rocker, however, the "slender, white-haired woman, slightly stooped, wearing a triangular shawl over a long full dress" was a "familiar figure" in Livermore, according to Zylpha Bernal Beck, a longtime resident. Mrs. Oliver wore a bonnet or a wide-brimmed straw hat and used a crooked cane made of manzanita wood. Townspeople affectionately called the eccentric character "Aunt Lizzie."

As time went by, people began to associate her name with that of the street. She died in 1903. Her obituary in the *Herald* said that she built the first house on Lizzie Street, "which was named in her honor." So, there we are—with two conflicting ideas about the naming of the street. City fathers unintention-

ally removed the dilemma by changing the street's name to "South Livermore Avenue" in 1927. Leona McGlinchey complained, "The people of Livermore had decided the name 'Lizzie' was not sophisticated enough."

Eliza "Lizzie" Boggs Oliver was born in 1818 in what would become West Virginia. When she was a few years old, her family moved to Missouri. Her uncle, Lilburn Boggs, became the lieutenant-governor (1832-1836), then governor of Missouri (1836-1841), and then state senator (1842-1846). Her father, Lawrence Boggs, was a part of this political circle. He became a wealthy man and was lavish in his hospitality; prominent Missourians were frequently guests at his home. Upset by Governor Lilburn Boggs's decision to expel the Mormons from the state, a Mormon fanatic shot Boggs in the head with a shotgun in 1842, but he managed to survive. According to her obituary, "In her old age, Mrs. Oliver was fond of speaking of her acquaintance with well-known pioneer politicians, preachers, and lawyers, and she told many interesting anecdotes of men who afterward became of national importance."

In 1846 Lilburn Boggs and his family traveled to California by wagon train. When they arrived in Sonoma, Mariano Vallejo hosted them at his Petaluma hacienda for some months. Lilburn Boggs was appointed the *alcalde*



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of Sonoma in 1847 and served for two years. After retiring, he ran a general store in Sonoma until 1852 when he moved to his Napa Valley farm where he died in 1860 at the age of 64. He never wholly recovered from the effects of the gunshot wounds. Some of the shot remained in his head, and several shots passed through his neck, tearing up his mouth.

Aunt Lizzie married Louis Oliver in 1833; he died in 1838. The following year she married John Griffin, who died eight years later. They had a son, also named John. For some reason, she chose to use the surname "Oliver" for the rest of her life. We don't know why or how, but we do know that she came to California in 1861. The railroad did not come cross-country yet, so she probably journeyed by wagon train. She became a cook for two different fam-



Aunt Lizzie Oliver (Photo Livermore Heritage Guild)

ilies. Then she was hired as a cook for a hotel managed by Alexander J. McLeod in Centerville, now a part of Fremont. McLeod moved to Livermore in 1869, and perhaps upon his urging, she came to Livermore two years later, bought property from him, and built her house.

Today's doctors would be happy that Aunt Lizzie Oliver walked around downtown Livermore,

visiting with locals and getting her exercise for almost 30 years. On 27 May 1900 she fell on the sidewalk and fractured her left hip. Several days later, livery owner Eugene Day and Mrs. Michel drove her to the county infirmary. At first, her recovery seemed uncertain, but she was back at her home by September. About a year later, she sold her house and two weeks after that, she was declared

incompetent by the court. Lawyer George W. Langan of Livermore was declared her guardian. Her obituary said that she had "acquired a small competence upon which she lived until a few months ago." Because of her failing health and the loss of her funds, she was returned to the infirmary in September 1903. "She welcomed the return to the infirmary and it is said that she was happy and contented during these last few months of her career." She died at age 85 on 9 November 1903.

In April 1976, in honor of both Lizzies, the Livermore City Council created Lizzie Fountain Park at the northwest corner of Mill Square, after the old Hub Saloon was torn down. In 2001, a project to raise money to repair the fountain offered citizens the opportunity to buy commemorative bricks. More than 350 bricks were engraved and installed around the fountain by June 2001. Many people believe that South Livermore and North Livermore Avenues diverge at the flagpole, but the demarcation line is actually Railroad Avenue.

Correction from last week: Our Savior Lutheran Church was originally at East Avenue and Jensen Street.

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