

Francis (Frank) Fassett was born in Freeman, Maine, in 1846. According to his obituary, when he had “reached his majority,” he had left the family farm for Wisconsin and then Washington. He worked in the lumbering industry, but also managed to study law and passed the bar, although he never practiced his profession. He came to California in 1870 at age 23 and arrived in Livermore shortly thereafter. He preempted 160 acres along the east side of Beck Road (North Livermore Avenue), about a mile north of what is now Interstate 580. In 1880 the Murray Township agricultural census showed Fassett with a total of 260 acres (he had bought 100 more). He had raised in the year 1879 a total of 60 tons of hay and 675 bushels of wheat and made 300 pounds of butter. In addition, he had sold 250 eggs, 40 poultry, and 40 swine. He owned nine horses and two cows.

Julia Brier was born in Indiana in 1850. She came to California and in 1870 was teaching the primary department of the Livermore Grammar School in one building. Fassett was the principal and teacher of the upper grades in another building on a lot given by A.J. McLeod. A dispute arose about the property. William Mendenhall offered the lot where Fifth Street School is today. A new grammar school

Do You Remember?

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Francis Ronello Fassett and Julia Brier Fassett

was built on the Mendenhall lot in 1876. By that time, we have no proof that Fassett was still involved with the school, and Julia certainly was not because they were married in 1875. In those days married women did not teach school. Perhaps together they worked hard at the ranch in order to achieve the results listed in the 1880 agricultural census.

The Fassett home at 1881 Sixth Street was built in early 1887. The Fassetts leased their ranch and moved into Livermore to their new house. The lovely one-story Queen Anne-style cottage featured innovative interior woodwork. Rather than being painted and grained in the current fashion, the interior redwood trim was left with its natural grain showing. The floors were of first cut pine. The original front door contained stained glass. Two gables, one on the north and

one on the east, project from the hipped roof. The generous front porch has an ornamented wooden fence. A wide variety of surface details sheath the building, from wide shiplap to fish scale shingles. Sun bursts decorate the gables. A detached carriage house has a small door above the carriage doors for hay storage.

In October 1903 Fassett had a six-room cottage built on his ranch, presumably for his tenant farmer; it is still there, without any additions—a little green house with a front porch. Julius Jensen leased Fassett’s ranch on North Livermore Avenue starting in 1911 and bought it from his estate in October 1925. Julius’s son Albin continued running the ranch, and now his grandson has it.

In 1886, Frank Fassett was managing the lumber department of the Anspacher store in

Livermore. Then he went into business as a manager of local hay and grain warehouses. These large buildings, at first wood and then metal, were scattered next to the railroad tracks, where the proprietors had easy access to railroad shipping. Warehouse owners served as brokers, and at times, speculative buyers of hay or grain for the purpose of reselling it. By 1904 Livermore had 12 warehouses with a holding capacity of 50,000 tons.

Fassett served as a Republican assemblyman in the California legislature from 1890 to 1896. In Livermore he led the local movement to organize a high school immediately after passage of the Union High School Act in March 1891. He called together representatives from eleven local school districts for a meeting in Livermore: Livermore, Inman, Green, Harris, Townsend, Vista, Mocho, May, Pleasanton, Midway, and Highland. All except Pleasanton and Midway agreed to form a union high school district. None of these little districts could have formed a high school by itself—none had the resources. Fassett’s efforts were successful. The Livermore Union High School District, formed on May 23, 1891, was the first in the State of California. Fassett also helped to organize the First National Bank of Livermore, and

at his death he was still the vice-president.

Julia Brier Fassett was the niece of William W. Brier, organizer of Livermore’s Presbyterian Church. She joined the church in 1876 and was active in its community all her life. She was a strong supporter of woman’s voting rights. In 1897 she rode a bicycle, then a fairly new machine, from her home out to Mocho School on Mines Road for a surprise party for the teacher. She enjoyed traveling, taking several trips abroad without her husband. In 1910 she journeyed to Europe, seeing the Oberammergau Passion Play in Bavaria, the Alps, Paris, and other cities on the continent. Several months after her return home, she left on the steamship liner *China* for Honolulu.

At age 67, Frank Fassett died suddenly at his home in 1914. His funeral was held at the Masonic Hall. After her husband’s death, Julia moved to Oakland. She journeyed to Italy in 1923. Two years later, she started on a trip to the South Seas but had to leave the ship at Honolulu and return home because of illness. She died in Oakland on February 6, 1925. In her will, she left \$1,000 to the First Presbyterian Church of Livermore.

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