

Do You Remember?



By Anne Homan

The “G” in G&M Farms

Two young men, after graduation from Livermore High School, decided to continue in the footsteps of their families in local agriculture. John Gandolfo and Dan Marciel have not found that career an easy one. The Gandolfos recently had one of their choicest fields gobbled up by the new Isabel Road highway exit. Dan, whose family’s property is on Collier Canyon, has struggled with lack of water for his cattle and his vegetables.

Their decision to work together on the pumpkin patch and corn maze on the Gandolfo property at 487 East Airway Boulevard for the last seventeen years has been a good one. At first, they grew their own pumpkins, but because of their smaller acreage and the exhaustion of the soil by pumpkin growing, they have recently bought pumpkins from other growers. Dan Marciel, however, still grows gourds and some specialty pumpkins. They added the corn maze, which takes up six acres, in 2003. They run these two events as well as a number of tours for school-age children and their teachers during the entire month of October (weather permitting).

An earlier family, the Ramkes, first owned the Gandolfo property. Max Ramke came from Neundorf, a town in an area called Schlesweig-Holstein that has gone back and forth in ownership between Germany and Denmark. He immigrated about 1870 and came directly to the Livermore area. He farmed with Herman Ruter Sr. on land near the Pleasanton brick works on Stanley Boulevard, then called the Livermore-Pleasanton Road. After Ruter died in 1874, Max married his widow, Lena, and acquired the farm. In 1880, according to his obituary, he bought property on the north side of East Airway Boulevard, then named the Dublin Road, and moved his family there. By this time they had three children: Max, Arthur, and Helen “Lena.”

Meanwhile, his brother, Otto Ramke, had bought matching farmland on the south side of Dublin Road. He built a home for his family there in the spring of 1896. In May 1908 Otto Ramke sold his 268 acres of land to Luigi

Gandolfo, along with his stock and buildings, for \$30,000. Anita Gandolfo remembered that Otto and his family left their furniture and all their farm tools and machinery behind because they were moving to Germany. Luigi Gandolfo and his wife, Guiditta, had emigrated from Rovigno, in the province of Genoa, Italy in 1864 to New York and had moved to San Francisco by 1874, where he ran a drayage business. Guiditti, however, was unhappy living in a big city, and she talked her husband into moving to farmland near Livermore. They had been farming in the Townsend District to the east of Livermore since 1905. On 11 May 1920, Lena Ramke married Richard Gandolfo, son of Luigi. Max Ramke Sr. died in 1918 and his wife in 1910. After young Max Ramke committed suicide in 1930, Richard and Lena Gandolfo added the Max Ramke property across the road to the Gandolfo holdings.

The farmyard at the Otto Ramke/Luigi Gandolfo home place has a number of old buildings

that have been carefully preserved over the years. There are three large barns: a horse barn, a milking barn, and a feeder barn. Since they had a milking barn, they must have kept a small herd of milk cows, most likely to sell their cream to creameries. In 1935 Richard joined the Wool Growers Association, so he probably had sheep as well. There is a lovely little two-story Victorian house built by Otto Ramke. A good-sized chicken coop testifies to their raising chickens for family use and for selling their eggs to local merchants. The most unusual building, however, is one that the Gandolfos used as a granary. The wooden building has a front porch with an overhang held up with four pillars. Beneath the overhang is a large double door, with windows on either side. Facing the porch, you see that the left side of the building has an annex with two large folding doors that could be used to store a stage coach or horses. There are two windows on both sides, and two more at the rear along with another sliding

door. This structure is unlike any granary I have seen, and family rumor says that it used to be a stage coach stop.

When World War II began, the Navy took over the Livermore airport, then on Rincon Avenue. In order to have more of a buffer zone to the west of the airport, the federal government forced the Gandolfo family to sell them a large portion of their property.

Richard and Lena Gandolfo had a son named Richard, and he married Anita Caratti, whose parents owned the buildings and land in Joesville on the old Dublin Road not far from the Gandolfo farm. Anita lives in small modern house on the farm, and their son, John, and his family also live there. Anita said that her husband and his father raised hay and grain on their properties and acted as hay and grain brokers. The business was called Richard Gandolfo and Sons. They hauled hay and grain from local ranches and farms to the feed lots of the stockyards in Stockton and San Francisco in four large trucks. Next week, I will write about the “M” in G&M Farms—the Marciel family.

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