

Do You Remember?



By Anne Homan
Livermore City Historian

The Purest and Best Beer

What motivated our ancestors to give up their nomadic lifestyle and plant cereal crops? Some botanists claim bread-making and others beer brewing. The Egyptian hieroglyph for food combines the symbols for bread and beer. Pressed into a Mesopotamian clay tablet dated approximately 1800 BC, the earliest known written recipe is for beer. Livermore citizens could once buy a beer brewed in their hometown, although not from this ancient recipe.

In downtown Livermore, on the south side of First Street between J and K streets, brass letters spelling the word “brewery” are still embedded into the sidewalk in front of the store at 2127 First. In December 1873 Charles Schwerin and a Mr. Schobel founded the Livermore Brewery. Wendell Jordan, a native of Bavaria, Germany, came to Livermore and bought the brewery from Charles Schwerin in June

ery and rebuilt. His new building on First Street at the site of the surviving sidewalk letters had two stories, with the brewery below and family living quarters on the second floor. Originally, the brewery machinery was run by horses; in December 1882 Jordan had added a six-horsepower steam engine to put the machinery in motion. The brewery capacity at that time was 400 barrels per year. He took time off from his enterprise in April 1883 to marry Gertrude E. Bearer in San Francisco. When the couple returned to Livermore, friends met them at the depot and held a reception for them at their home.

In 1889 Jordan built an ice house at the back of the brewery to keep beer cold in the warm months. According to the *Echo*, he bought a “splendid” new brewery wagon made by local blacksmith F.A. Schrader in February 1896. In January 1897 he

years. He also served as a town trustee for six years including a two year term as mayor.

Fred Tretzel remembered as a child stopping at the old brewery, but not for beer. “Your mother sent you to school with your lunch in a five-pound lard pail, and asked you to stop at Wendell Jordan’s brewery on your way home to get some yeast in your pail, and she would make biscuits for supper.”

On Saturday January 19, 1901, the *Herald* lead article stated, “One of the most terrible accidents that has ever occurred in Livermore, deprived the town on Thursday of one of its most respected citizens, Wendell Jordan.” On Thursday morning Jordan had started cooking a new batch of malt. After the malt was boiling in the vat, he began to clean out a small tank nearby. Somehow he fell into the boiling malt. By the time his assistant had drained the vat enough

tact with the boiling malt as he evidently struck head first.” His wife and daughter, Ada, age 17, survived him. He was only 56.

Livermore businessman Dennis F. Bernal bought the brewery from Mrs. Jordan in July 1901. In the June 4, 1902, *United States Health Bulletin*, Dr. Amos Gray wrote an article entitled “A Safe Drink for Summer” that recommended beer. After having tested beer from all over the United States, Gray concluded, “The result of the investigation has proven the proper beer to drink and the purest and best to be the beer from the Livermore Brewery, Livermore, Cal.”

In November 1908 the brewery building burned down, along with the one-story saloon next door. Bernal and his family, who had been sleeping on the second floor above the brewery, barely escaped the inferno in their night clothes. There



Wendell Jordan

Josephine Bernal told her husband that she had been saving a portion of her household allowance each week in a receptacle behind the chimney. The *Herald* article said, “Mr. Bernal dug in the debris as directed and expected to find a few dollars. To his utter astonishment, he found more than \$2,000 in gold coins, which had only been slightly discolored by the fire.” The Bernal family did not rebuild, and the Livermore Brewery went out of business.

bread, C.J. Stevens built the first flour mill in town in 1869, so for Livermore, bread came first.

Correction: I need to apologize to Paul Weiss for my incorrect statement in last week’s column. He did not lend his own money to buy the land for Hillcrest Gardens. He acquired it from the Synod of the Golden Gate.

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the following year. In December 1875 Jordan also acquired a single-story building to the west, William Sinkwitz's saloon, and Jordan used it as a saloon where the customers' choices included his local beer, Bavarian Lager.

Ten years later, Jordan tore down the old brew-

advertised in the *Herald* that the brewery carried Weiland's, Fredricksburg and United States lager beer, in kegs and large and small bottles that could be delivered to any part of town or vicinity. Jordan helped to organize the Livermore Fire Department and acted as foreman for more than 20

for rescuers to pull Jordan out, his "flesh was literally cooked and the features were so badly disfigured as to be unrecognizable. Although death was not instantaneous, it is likely that the fatal plunge was not attended by any suffering as he must have become unconscious the moment he came in con-

was a bright spot in this sadness, however.

Keeping in mind our dual theme of beer and



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