

Do You Remember?

By Anne Homan
Livermore City Historian



Vasco: A Visitor from Australia

In the spring of 1910, a young man named Vasco Loureiro came to Livermore. We are not sure why he came. Perhaps he heard of our Vasco Road and was curious about its name. We know that he spent some time in San Francisco. He was very talented at drawing caricatures of people. Although classified as caricatures, the drawings are really portraits, with the majority of the drawing being the head, and the rest of the body being much smaller in proportion. While in Livermore, he made drawings of the clients at the Hub saloon, which was then on the site of the current Lizzie Fountain. Forty-three of the caricatures were kept together in a collection by Dan Berry. More of them were done—we know of at least one owned by John Foscalina.

Vasco grew up in Melbourne, Australia, and attended Xavier College, a Roman Catholic school for boys from grades seven to 12. After graduation, he took night classes in drawing at the National Gallery of Victoria from 1901 to 1905. His father deserted the family in 1901. Vasco's mother struggled to support Vasco and his two sisters. Vasco moved to Sydney in 1906 and began to draw postcards and caricatures for passengers on the harbor ferries at a shilling a sketch. Enthused by his success at the harbor, he decided to embark on a round-the-world journey on ships, sketching for his living as he went.

We can trace his travels, from Tasmania and New Guinea and then to England. With England as his base, he took side trips to Paris, Dublin, and Edinburgh. He sailed in September 1907 from Liverpool to New York City on a steamer. He made his way down to Florida and then to the Panama Canal site, where he drew sketches of the building of the canal. By May 1909 he was in San Francisco. The Call noted, "Vasco Loureiro, a brilliant young English sketch artist, is in San Francisco taking mental snapshots of the city. Loureiro is an artist of considerable merit and has traveled the world over in search of data which he will use in compiling a book to be illustrated with his own sketches."

On March 26, 1910, the Herald ran a short piece in its "Local Brevities" column: "The Hub saloon has an art exhibit which attracts a great deal of attention. It is a gallery of local celebrities executed in crayon by Vasco Loureiro. The likeness of most of them is excellent." The artist always signed his drawings with his first name, then a slash, then the year. (Vasco/10) The item in the Herald was the first clue to his surname. When I entered his full name into Google, a great deal of information opened up in Australia.

After leaving Livermore, he traveled up the coast to the Puget Sound area and rode on ferries serving Seattle, Victoria, and Vancouver. Wear-



Vasco self-portrait with chalkholder in France, 1918.

(Courtesy of State Library of New South Wales)

ing a "soft cap and long silk flowing tie, without which no Bohemian artist considers himself properly dressed," according to a Victoria newspaper in 1913, he was continuing his career. He had tentatively titled his book "Around the World on a Pencil." He returned to Australia, but war interrupted his writing. By 1916 Australia was deeply involved with Great Britain in World War I. In the battle of Gallipoli on April 25, Australian and New Zealand forces were defeated in Turkey; 7,594 Australians were killed. This roused a strong patriotic feeling in Australia and might explain Vasco's enlistment in May in Brisbane. According to his enlistment papers, he was five feet seven inches tall and weighed 140 pounds. He had brown eyes and dark brown hair. His rank in the army was that of a sapper, that is, a combat engineer.

His unit embarked at Sydney on November 11, 1916 and arrived in England on 30 January 1917. At the training camp and on the voyage, Vasco drew a number of caricatures and portraits of his messmates. Collections of the drawings are in two Australian museums—the

Australian War Museum and the State Library of New South Wales. A few of them are titled "Gordon from Coonamble," "Padre," "Scotty Bob from Dundoo Hills," "Soldiers at Sea," and "Washing Day at Sea." After training in England, his unit arrived in France on 16 May 1917 to engage in the trench warfare of the Western Front. About a year later, Vasco received the wound that led to his death in August 1918; he was 36 years old.

After his death, his personal effects were shipped to his widow in Brisbane. Among them were a rosary, six drawing books, a box of watercolor paints and brushes, two boxes of pencils and crayon holders, a brush case, and a box of paint tubes. One of his paint boxes, donated to the Australian War Museum by his niece, has a bullet hole. Vasco left a note: "When we were shelled out of our digs my watercolour box stopped one on the Somme."

Much of his work was done on the spur of the moment, his chance sitters being passengers on steamers, fellow soldiers, and the men (women were not allowed entrance) who were customers at a local saloon. Livermore is indeed fortunate to have its collection of drawings. Linda Ivey, Assistant Professor of History at Cal State, East Bay, said, "Vasco's Livermore, 1910 provides a whimsical way to access a local community's past. . . . With spotlights on community members from an oil man to the ice man, they (the sketches) deliver the biography of a town on the verge of modernity. . . ." Vasco did not publish a book, but he inspired me to write one. It can be purchased at the Carnegie Building.

(Readers can reach me at am50homan@yahoo.com.)