

## Do You Remember?



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### The Hagemann Ranch Historic District

When my family moved to Livermore in 1970, there were no Farmers' Markets. A new friend suggested that I go on Stanley Boulevard toward Pleasanton and soon turn right, bumping over the railroad tracks. I followed the gravel road to the August Hagemann Jr. farm, where I bought delicious tomatoes, squash, and green beans. If you start in town, you can find the old Hagemann place to the south of Olivina Avenue, just past Hagemann Park. Originally, it was on the northeastern edge of the Bernal and Pico families' Rancho El Valle de San José.

The ranch house was built about 1836 for the rancho's workmen, according to the late Herbert Luders Hagemann Jr., who lived there his entire life. Its original three rooms were built with one-inch-thick and 24-inch-wide spruce boards from Maine, rather than with the usual adobe.

The lumber had been shipped around Cape Horn. The Martin Mendenhall family became squatters on the land about 1852, and when the Bernals' right to the land was upheld by the U.S. courts in 1863, Mendenhall paid \$4,000 for 400 acres, including the house.

The Mendenhalls added other small rooms, built with redwood from the Oakland hills. "Martin Mendenhall went busted raising race horses here," Hagemann said.

Herbert Hagemann Jr.'s grandfather, August Hagemann Sr., a native of Holstein, Germany, bought the house and 185 acres from Mendenhall in 1890 and lived there until 1906. Then he leased out the ranch until his son Herbert's family moved there in 1916. The Hagemann family tree included Maas Luders, also a native of Holstein, Germany, who had come to the valley in 1862. He was married to Maria Hagemann; August Hagemann Sr. was her son by an earlier marriage. Luders bought land from William M. Mendenhall in October 1881—640 acres west of Livermore for \$37,500. He built a mansion on the property in 1883 at a cost of \$8,000.

Bob and Pat Lane, in their book *The Amador-Livermore Valley*, said, "He was known as one of the leading grain farmers in the valley, at one time farming much of the land between Livermore and Pleasanton." Luders's mansion deteriorated over the years; it was burned

as a training exercise by the local fire departments in 1965. Some of his rich grain lands are now the Livermore Airport and the Water Reclamation Plant. After Luders's death the three sons of August Hagemann Sr.—Herbert, August Jr., and Edwin—divided the Luders/Hagemann properties, with Herbert acquiring the acreage closest to Livermore that held the old ranch house.

As a 10-year-old in 1931, Herbert Luders Hagemann Jr. was already driving: "We had a Case car, and I used to drive uptown to Livermore. I'd get the mail, and get the groceries, and stop at Lassen's. And ma would say, "Watch out for Doten," who was chief of police. He'd wave at me at the flagpole."

In an interview in 1985, he described the system for paying town merchants: "I can remember in the kitchen we had the grocery bills on a nail for the whole year. And at the end of the year, we'd add 'em up and pay the bill. When you sold your crop, say sometime in the fall, you went to town, and you paid your bill." He felt that the Depression changed that—farmers began to bring in goods to trade with the

merchants, especially eggs and butter. Herb recalled that one year they hunted mushrooms and sold them to Bargmann's grocery. They also began selling cream to the local creamery and later shipping it by train to city creameries. "The cows were mortgage payers—you got a good weekly check off of them from the creamery." Herb farmed the family spread, alternating grain, livestock, and tomatoes, through the years. About 1962 he became involved in historic preservation and helped to found the Amador-Livermore Valley Historical Society. He wrote several chapbooks on local history.

The Hagemanns gradually sold most of their land for development, and only five acres are left. But despite being surrounded by suburbia, the place still has the feel of a farm. Two century-old barns, the granary, two chicken coops, a milk house, and the blacksmith shop are lined up on the site. The original ranch house, twined around an ancient valley oak, now houses a cheerful up-to-date office created from a sunroom.

In 2007 a San Francisco architectural firm was engaged to fill out a



**Hagemann Farm and its old oak tree (2004).**

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. The completed form, describing in detail the site and its buildings, is 40 pages long. The architects did not start their history of the farm with the oral testimony of Herb Hagemann about the 1836 date, but concluded that they could only prove that Martin Mendenhall built the original east-to-west section of the house in 1870. Many pieces were added through the years, including a tack and jockey quarters for Mendenhall's horse business and an egg room to handle the processing of eggs for

sale. Porches, bedrooms, and a bathroom were built on later. The form points out that, even though the farm is surrounded by housing developments, when you stand in the center of the farmyard, none of the modern houses are visible. The observer can acquire a strong sense of nineteenth-century farming in the Livermore Valley."

The farm is now on the National Register of Historic Places. The therapeutic riding program, Hoofprints on the Heart, which services children with disabilities has used the site since 2006.

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