

Livermore Heritage Guild

Saving Yesterday For Tomorrow



P.O. Box 961, Livermore, CA 94551

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VALLEY'S OLDEST SCHOOL ON THE SAME SITE

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St. Michael School Celebrates Centennial: April 27th

St. Michael School, Livermore's Catholic school, commemorates its 100th anniversary this year with special events in April, May and September and with a major historical research project undertaken by its current students.

The entire community is invited to attend a special Celebration Mass on Saturday, April 27th at 3:00 p.m. at St. Michael's Church. Students, alumni and staff will participate.

Following the mass, everyone will be invited to an open house at the school. Each classroom has been assigned a different decade of school history over the past century. Students have made display boards showing important historical events, the Pope, fashion, food, entertainment and transportation during each decade. A video will also be running in each classroom, displaying class pictures from that decade. Alumni are encouraged to share memories.

Pasta dinner tickets for all seatings (5 p.m. and 6 p.m.) are sold out. The dining area will be decorated with class photos and on the tables will be flowers made by the kindergarten, first and second grade students. The Parish Hall will display congratulatory letters from the Pope and various government officials.

St. Michael School will continue its centennial celebration on Saturday, May 18th, when a family picnic will be held on the Monsignor Adams field across from the school.



St. Michael School held its first classes in September 1913. Aerial photographer Dick Jones took this bird's eye picture in 1980. The school occupies the block bounded by Maple (bottom), 4th (right), Church (top) and 3rd (left) streets. The original 1913 building (center of photo) was demolished in 2004.

Staffed by the Dominican Sisters of San Rafael, the school opened its doors in September 1913. On Friday, Sept. 20, 2013, the Mayor of Livermore will present a proclamation to the parents and students of St. Michael School. The students will celebrate the occasion with a birthday cake for the school.

St. Michael School is the oldest school in the Livermore-Amador Valley to operate on the same site throughout its 100-year history. Since its inception in 1913, St. Michael has operated continuously on the block bordered by Maple, Fourth, Church and Third streets. (The church building opened across Fourth St. five years later in 1918.) St. Michael attained this record when the Livermore Grammar School, which began

its operation at its Fifth Street campus in 1875, closed in 1982. The Pleasanton grammar school has closed; Murray School in Dublin (the Valley's oldest educational institution) moved to a new campus in the mid-20th century. Livermore High School was founded in 1891, but it has been at its Maple Street campus only since 1930.

A future newsletter will present more information about school history. A Guild History Lecture also is planned.

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In Memoriam: TV Host Huell Howser

The Livermore Heritage Guild joins historical societies and citizens across California in mourning the death of Tennessee-twanged Huell Howser (1945-2013), host of "California's Gold," a public television program that focused on the Golden State's historic sites and natural wonders.

Mr. Howser's program visited Livermore twice. On October 29, 2008, he and cameraman Cameron Tucker visited the famous light bulb at Fire Station No. 6 on East Avenue (Program #11002 "Places I've Always Wanted to Go). He interviewed retired Division Fire Chief Lynn Owens and Fire Engineer Pierre Rodriguez. En route, he stopped at the old fire station downtown, then home to Firehouse Bistro & Books, where he dined on 'Firehouse chili.'

Howser confessed on-tape to Owens and Rodriguez, "Before we go inside to see this light bulb, I've been scared to death that it's going to burn out before we get here. Or that you were going to call me last night and say, 'Huell, don't worry about coming, it burned out on us.'"

In 2011, Howser featured the downtown Livermore flagpole and interviewed Guild President Jeff Kaskey, whom Top: Huell Howser interviewed Lynn Owens in 2008. Bothe renamed "Ken." (Program #13007 "Flagpoles"). The program began at the relocated and shortened 1905 flagpole in Carnegie Park. "It still makes a statement," Mr. Howser declared. "When you're in Livermore and talking about flagpoles, the story just keeps on going." Then Mr. Howser went to Pleasanton to talk to the Tri-Valley Wood Carvers about their projects with flagpole wood, announcing, "This is really exciting." Slapping a section of the old flagpole, he decreed, "Boy, that's a big thick piece of flagpole - historic - Livermore - wood." The segment concluded with a visit to the new downtown flagpole, where he read the text of a 2008 plaque placed by the Livermore

Historic Preservation Commission. the beautiful, poignant kicker of all this story is ... that you can see this flagpole ... from the Carnegie Library ... the two in juxtaposition are still standing and still flying flags in Livermore," he said.

Jeff Kaskey recalls in 2013, "Being interviewed by him was quite an experience. First, you may not notice in the program, but he is a big man, and I often felt dwarfed next to him. He is just as enthusiastic and highenergy when the camera is off, which of course is why the program worked so well. The show was just him being him, and he is







tom: Mr. Howser with Jeff Kaskey in 2011. Below: Mr. Howser and Cameron Tucker filmed the 107 year-old light bulb.

fun to watch. There were no second takes, all the content is done as a live interview with only the very slightest pre-planning. He might say 'I'm going to ask you about A, B and C,' and then he starts the shot, during which he asks about B, A and D, E and F. Fortunately, they do some nice edits. But all the dialogue you see is just as it stumbled out, with no rehearsing."

Local photographer Dick Jones (see photos, this page) writes in 2013 of the light bulb filming, "Huell told us (Continued on p. 7)







essage From the President

Dear Members: After a raucous March, April is our prep month for a big May this year. The auction, of course, as our main fundraiser and fun social and redecorating event, is occupying much of our energy, but we also are passing a milestone for the new HistoryMobile.

As you see in HistoryMobile chairperson Nancy Mulligan's event invitation on the back cover of this newsletter, we are declaring the HistoryMobile "finished" and ready to roll. The paint on Vera Lowdermilk's mural is dry, Bonnie Pasternack and Anne Anaya's exhibits have had a final inspection and are tied tightly to Tom Eberly's display shelves, signage is looking crisp and Tim Sage and Tom have made the engine purr. We have drivers and docents. The volunteer hours and skill that made this happen were unbelievable to watch. Nancy begged, borrowed and stole (not really, or at least I don't want to know about it) to get all the pieces together. With Barbara Soules helping on grant applications, Rotary Foundation kicked in a very generous donation and LCAC (our Cultural Arts Council) and the City's Commission For the Arts provided funding. Volunteer time and materials from Home Depot were more than (in-)kind. Many others (who will be recognized at the May 25th Grand Unveiling) have been an important part of creating this rolling museum.

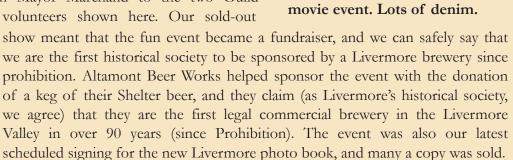
Even for an organization interested in sharing local history, it is hard to overstate the value of a dedicated roving museum. Schools often lack the funds or flexibility to stage many field trips, so traveling for local history may not be possible. Our HistoryMobile can bring unique artifacts, fun activities and trained docents to create a memorable experience for all our

local schools.

"Positive signs" mean something is looking up, and in our case if you are looking up as you travel through town you may notice the new "Historic" signs high on light poles and road signs along the original Lincoln Highway route. LHG partnered with the Lincoln Highway Association and, in particular, lots of assistance from Michael Kaelin, along with excellent support from the City of Livermore, to add our town to the many across the country that are marking their part of the highway in time for this centennial year of its dedication. Like Route 66 and El Camino Real, yesterday's Lincoln Highway route is now saved for tomorrow.

A special thank-you to everyone who helped with or attended our somewhat hastily-organized but wildly successful March 27th screening of "Gimme Shelter," the movie about the 1969 free concert featuring the Rolling Stones at Altamont raceway. Our special guest, Ron Schneider, had been the Stones' tour manager and his lively Q & A after the movie really made the event a special evening. Many of you came in costume, from Mayor Marchand to the two Guild

volunteers shown here. Our sold-out



The Auction this year, Saturday, May 25th, is again shaping up to be a great event. Roll-top desks, antiques and collectibles of all description, even a coin collection will be on the blocks. Please join us for an evening of lasagna and fast moving auction action. For those donated items that don't make it to the auction block, look for our yard sale at the 1960's library building, on the same day as the city-wide yard sale, Saturday, June 15th.



Barbara Soules and friend dressed the part for our '60s



Lincoln Highway sign newly installed on Portola Avenue, just east of Murrieta (Bireley station, left).

Phone Calls Traveled by Barbed Wire in 1890s-1910s Altamont

As early as 1884, the town of Livermore had some telephone service but it was not until 1906 there was any rural service and even then it was very limited. Before rural phone service, rapid communication (need for a doctor, help putting out fires, etc.) was difficult. It meant saddling up a horse, which took time, and riding in the rain or the dark and that was not a pleasure.

As a work-around, some farmers and ranchers constructed their own phone systems. One such system was that of Archibald "Archie" Young (1876-1958), built with the help of his brothers Jesse (1873-1920), Chester and "Guy" (1879-1926): the Altamont Barbed Wire Telephone Company, Limited. Their sister Alice (1867-1946) had married Richard Sweet (1862-1939) and lived at what is now 12020 Patterson Pass Road while the Youngs lived about 2.5 miles north at what is now 11761 North Flynn Road. A "barbed wire" line running roughly northsouth connected these residences; both homes still stand today.

Much of what we know about this system is from an 1898 San Francisco Call newspaper article and an article written by Francis J. Young (1911-90), a nephew of the telephone boys and son of their brother Fred (1883-1951), that was distributed with the August 1980 Livermore Heritage Guild newsletter.

Similar barbed wire phone systems were scattered around the western United States during that era. Anne Homan's *Historic Livermore* cites a 1963 *Independent* article that discusses a barbed wire telephone line that served Angelo Schenone's family on the former Robert Livermore, Jr., ranch in the early 1900s.



This article about the Altamont Barbed Wire Telephone Co. appeared in the San Francisco Call newspaper on January 12, 1898. The boys illustrated likely are Archie and Jesse Young.

The line ran between two homes (Young & Sweet) 2½ miles apart in the Altamont region from the 1890s until circa 1915.

Archie Young had become interested in electricity and when relatives sent him information about barbed wire telephone lines he must have thought that would be a great way to communicate between the Young and Sweet homes. The Young boys ran wire between the two homes. This meant following the fence lines between the houses which were anything but in a straight line. It also meant crossing canyons and working out a system to take into account the opening and closing of gates. The Young article says that since gates were used only during harvest and plowing times, "the gaps could be connected with a link of wire which could be removed to open the gate."

Charles Brown, a student of these types of phone systems, thinks that the wire used was not actually barbed wire but smooth wire, often called "open wire," that followed the barbed wire fencing. In our research we found that both types of wire were used by rural phone lines. If it was actually barbed wire, it would be the top strand of wire on a fence. If it was smooth wire, it might have been fastened to a stick mounted above the regular fencing. Whatever wire was used it had to be insulated so it would not ground out. However, Francis Young's article says,

"No attempt was made at insulation - continuity was the only problem." Texas newspaper columnist Delbert Trew says in his 2003 book *It's All About Trew* that some ranchers used leather straps nailed to wooden posts, corncobs, pieces of inner tubes, and other creative ways to insulate the phone wires from grounding.

There were a number of problems with barbed wire phone systems. For example if the wires grounded the phones would not work. The systems could be very dangerous to use during lightning storms (there are even stories of lightning coming out of telephones). If the wire was directly nailed to a wooden post and the post got wet the circuit would be shorted to ground and fail to operate. Retired railroad telecommunications manager Leonard Hall says people have called the barbed wire lines a "fair weather circuit." Nevertheless, the Call reported in 1898 of the Altamont phone line, "The boys say that weather conditions do not seem to affect this ingenious contrivance." The Young article says the call quality was good except for days of rain, heavy fog or when a hot dry North wind was blowing ("the circuit became quite noisy").

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The phones probably looked like those in the drawing on page 4. The Call explained, "The top wire on the fence is connected with the transmitter in each house by means of copper wire, and the transmission of sound is effected by a magnetic battery inclosed in a small walnut box attached to the wall at the end of the line." But Francis Young's article says that the "top wire" was not always used (the best wire was).

The *Call* added, "By turning a crank a bell is rung which calls up the desired party, and an ear trumpet answers the purpose for both listening and talking." Young's article says, "It was amusing ... to watch Alice talking to her sister Nellie in a rapid conversation, shifting the trumpet from ear to mouth in what was almost a sleight of hand in order not to miss a word."

Young's article says that the barbed wire telephone was in use until circa 1915, when a phone connection was made with the Livermore exchange.

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The Young family home at 11761 North Flynn Road was a terminal point of the Altamont Barbed Wire Telephone.

Darrel Sweet remembers when he was a boy that there still was a "farmer's line" from his parent's house on the corner of Almond and East Ave. in Livermore to past Hillcrest Ave. to the west and Taylor Lane (now Vasco Road) to the east. Darrel remembers that this phone line was a single smooth galvanized wire of about 10 gauge. He thinks the "farmer's line" was in use until about 1970. He remembers that when the phone system

failed they had to drive up and down East Ave. looking for and repairing the break. Darrel said that sometimes Pac Bell linemen would cut the line if it was in their way, not knowing the old wire was still in use.

Darrel believes that his grandparents, Charles S. Sweet (1891-1951) and Ozeta R. Sweet (1893-1986), helped to start the East Avenue farmer's line when they built their house at the corner of Almond and East avenues in 1924. That house is gone now. When Darrel's parents, Malvern and Jewell Sweet, built their home on Almond Ave. just south of East Ave. in 1952 it had a "big old hand crank oak phone." That phone is still in the house but was taken out of service and replaced in use over the years by a succession of more modern phones. Their original number was 49F3.

If any reader has information on local barbed wire or farmers' telephone lines, please contact the History Center.

-by Richard Finn

Events Calendar: Auction on May 25th

Saturday, May 25th

Livermore History Mobile Grand Opening at the Livermore Southern Pacific Railroad Depot, 22 South L Street, at 11:00 a.m. See page 8.

Annual Auction & Dinner, Duarte Garage/Highway Museum, Portola & L: Doors open/preview at 5 p.m. • Dinner at 6 p.m. • Auction at 7 p.m.

Fundraiser for Livermore Heritage Guild. In addition to antiques and collectibles, Livermore wines and olive oils will be available for auction. Auction is free and open to the public. Dinner is \$15.00. Drink tickets for wine, soft drinks and water will be sold inside. Dinner tickets are on sale at the History Center at 3rd & J St. For more information, call 925-449-9927.

<u>Saturday, June 15</u>th Post-Auction Yard Sale (part of Citywide Garage Sale) at corner of S. Livermore Ave. and Pacific Ave. (old library) from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Sunday, June 23rd: Lincoln Highway Centennial Caravan will visit Duarte/Lincoln Highway Garage in the morning. Livermore will be the first stop of the Lincoln Highway Association's official western caravan en route from San Francisco to its rendevous with the eastern caravan in Kearney, Neb. on June 30th

<u>Late September:</u> Annual General Meeting. Joe Medeiros will speak about his fapage 5 mily history and Granada High School's 50th anniversary.

Livermore Soldier Was in Iconic D-Day Photo With "Ike"

The photo at right is among the most iconic World War II images. It has a Livermore connection.

On the eve of the D-Day Allied invasion of Normandy to liberate continental Europe from Axis domination (Operation Overlord), General Dwight D. Eisenhower met with American "Screaming Eagles" paratroopers in England.

The last soldier in the foreground on the right (wearing a musette bag across his chest) is believed to be Army Corporal Donald E. Kruger, Livermore Union High School Class of 1941. He grew up in a house on East Avenue that still stands today adjacent to the high school campus. Telegrams sent to his parents say that he was "lightly wounded" on D-Day, June 6, 1944, and "seriously wounded" (as Sgt.) in Holland on Sept. 21, 1944 (Operation Market Garden). He died in Placerville on September 17, 1991.

His sister Alice Kruger Bruns first saw this photo in the July 1969 issue of *National Geographic* (p. 3) and recognized her brother. He confirmed the meeting with General Eisenhower 25 years earlier. She says that many veterans, including her brother and her husband Harold "Hal" Bruns, just did not talk about their war experiences.

Her brother said that the arrival of General "Ike" at the camp was electrifying. "If you ever wanted to see a bunch of soldiers run like crazy (to see him)," he told Alice. They were preparing to load up for their overnight mission to be dropped behind enemy lines across the English Channel. Alice says of her brother in the photo, "He's the one with the dirtiest face." (Paratroopers painted their faces as camouflage, especially for night missions.) She says that their mother would have been alarmed by his face paint because when they were growing up, "Mother always checked to make sure that his ears were clean."

Don Kruger's son Kelly Kruger worked at the Pentagon in the early 1970s. When he encountered the photo displayed in an office, he proudly exclaimed, "That's my Dad!"

Alice has amassed a small collection of items that depict the famous photo, ranging from war books to a "Peanuts" comic strip that includes Snoopy the dog drawn directly in front of her brother, wearing a helmet similar to his.

She says that Don very much wanted to fly military planes and considered a move to Canada to join the Royal Air Force. His high school buddy, Lt. Tommy Kelly, was



The official caption of this photo, according to the Library of Congress, is "General Dwight D. Eisenhower gives the order of the day, 'Full victory--nothing else' to paratroopers somewhere in England, just before they board their airplanes to participate in the first assault in the invasion of the continent of Europe."

A modern caption reads, "Photo shows General Eisenhower talking with American paratroopers on the evening of June 5, 1944, as they prepared for the Battle of Normandy. The men are part of Company E, 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment, at the 101st Airborne Division's camp in Greenham Common, England. Photo includes Sgt. Russell Wilmarth, behind Eisenhower's chin (Source: Alan Offen, 2009); Lt. Wallace C. Strobel with a "23" tag (Source: "Dwight David Eisenhower: The Centennial, CMH Pub 71-40); and Ralph "Bud" Thomas, to the left of Strobel (Source: Eileen Thomas Hayes, 2012)."

Corp. (later Sgt.) Donald E. Kruger is believed to be the last soldier in the foreground on the right, wearing a musette bag across his chest. But other sources say that it is William Crosby, Leonard Crawford or Michael Babich.

killed in action over Wewak, New Guinea in March 1944 as an Army Air Corps bombardier. (See Nov. 2009 newsletter.)

Alice was the family member who received the telegram on June 28, 1944 informing her parents that Don had been wounded on D-Day. A Livermore taxi driver delivered the telegram. "I shook like a leaf when that taxi arrived," she says. "As soon as the driver got out of the car, I said, 'Uh-oh." "-Jason Bezis

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News & Notes



Livermore's Public Works "Growth Spurt": 50 Years Later:

The golden anniversary of the "growth spurt" of Livermore public works is approaching. In the mid-1960s, numerous city building, transportation and park projects that transformed the community over the long term were underway.

The former rodeo grounds on South Livermore Avenue (condemned in 1959) became the Civic Center, beginning with a new public library (opened 1966). Robertson Park was created from part of the old Livermore Sanatorium property, where a new rodeo stadium opened in 1968. The municipal airport was relocated from Rincon Avenue to its current site (opened 1966). A municipal golf course was constructed to complement the airport.

Perhaps the most ubiquitous city project from that era is the "flying saucer" street lamp design, unveiled in 1963. They were removed from the heart of downtown in 1987-88, but many are still in existence.

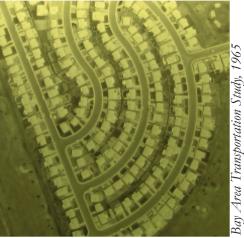
Future LHG newsletters will discuss these projects, with insights from former Councilman/Mayor John Shirley and former city librarian Don Nolte. If you have information or viewpoints on these projects or know someone who does, please contact the History Center. -J. Bezis

Springtown - 50th Anniversary:

A half century ago this month, home sales in Livermore's new Springtown development were underway.

Designed as a retirement community, age restrictions were dropped after developer Marnel faced financial problems in southern California and the neighboring "Proud Country" subdivision opened in the late 1960s.

Springtown, located far from the rest of Livermore and its commercial services, was regarded as a prime example of "suburban sprawl," which was common in California before the advent of county local agency formation commissions (LAFCOs) via the 1963 Knox-Nisbet Act.



Aerial view of Springtown, 1965.

Springtown was the first development in Livermore north of U.S. Highway 50/I-580. Numerous auto accidents occurred at the intersection of First Street with U.S. 50, where Springtown residents were forced to cross the four-lane expressway at grade. The original entrance road was Las Flores Road (which explains its great width today). The entrance shifted to Springtown Blvd. in December 1965 when the I-580 overcrossing and interchange opened.

If you wish to share stories about life in Springtown over the years, please send them to the History Center.-by Jason Bezis Page 7

Howser (Cont'd from Page 2)

to not tell him anything while he did the interview outside... he wanted to have a 'real' reaction when he walked in the door [to see the bulb] ... and he did ... Huell and Lynn were like twins ... same voice inflections, laid back, historical, easygoing attitudes, etc."

Longtime Guild member Anna Siig says: "It was with pleasure that I went out to Fire Station 6 to watch Huell Howser and his camera man film the light bulb and interview Lynn Owens."

"I found Mr. Howser a bit different than his on screen persona in that he was businesslike and worked in an efficient, pleasant, nononsense manner. He did some of the filming himself, climbing up the ladder to get close to the light bulb. He was so nice; just a very nice person to talk with."

"His interactions were smooth and delightful at the same time. He and Lynn worked well together - men who could get the job done and be pleasant, direct and full of fun! It seemed to me that Mr. Howser was interested in the bulb story and at the same time, it was evident that he was there to do a job and be efficient about doing it."

In 2011, Mr. Howser's "California's Golden Fairs" program featured the Alameda County Fair in Pleasanton, with a focus on its racetrack (Program #109).

These broadcasts can be viewed online at: http://blogs.chapman.edu/huell-howserarchives. -by Jason Bezis



Lynn Owens with Huell Howser, gesturing to the light bulb at LPFD Station No. 6.

New Livermore HistoryMobile To Be Dedicated: Sat., May 25th

The Livermore Heritage Guild is holding a celebration to dedicate the new Livermore HistoryMobile. It will take place on **Saturday, May 25** at 11:00 A.M. in front of the historic Livermore **Southern Pacific Railroad Depot** at 22 South L St.

The mayor will be there, all the volunteers who have worked so hard for the last couple of years will be honored, a children's chorus will perform the official Livermore song and there will be refreshments provided. All are invited to attend.

Afterward tour the new HistoryMobile – a museum of Livermore history from fossils to today. Docents will tell the stories and share the artifacts which make textbook lessons more meaningful and long lasting. A team of volunteer professionals has worked countless hours over the



'ROLLING MURAL' IS NEW HISTORY-MOBILE: The new Livermore HistoryMobile features a train and the S.P. Depot on its left side (above) and a rodeo, a vineyard and Ravenswood on its right side (below). Artist Vera Lowdermilk created the murals.



past two years to transform the interior into a beautifully-crafted rolling museum that brings local history to schools and events.

Vera Lowdermilk recently painted murals on the HistoryMobile. The left side depicts a spring scene with a steam locomotive, the S.P. Depot and wildflowers. The right side features a vineyard, Ravenswood and a rodeo in summer/fall. Noted local pinstriper Herb Martinez did the lettering. A Rotarian Foundation of Livermore grant made the mural possible.

The Heritage Guild now has a new, very unique way to continue saving yesterday for tomorrow in Livermore. -by Nancy Mulligan That evening will be the annual Guild Auction at the Duarte/Lincoln Highway Garage. Opens at 5 p.m. See p. 5.

Annual membership dues are: Individual \$25.00, Family \$35.00, Student Senior (age 62+) \$15.00, Student \$15.00, Sponsor \$75.00 and Patron and Business \$300.00 memberships are also available. Please make checks payable to "LHG." Mail to Checks payable to "LHG." Mail to

The Livermore Heritage Guild History Center is located in the historic 1911 Carnegie Library building at 2155 Third Street. History Center hours generally are Wednesday through Sunday, 11:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Phone: (925) 449-927. Free admission.

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