

# Do You Remember?



By Anne Homan

## Where's the Beef?

Before the days of refrigeration and supermarkets, housewives shopped almost daily at their local butcher's shop. The cattle and sheep raised on the valley hills made for a plentiful supply of local meat. Before refrigeration, ice was shipped in by the railroads.

Peter McKeany came to Livermore in 1871 and opened the City Meat Market in rented space. He soon purchased property on First Street and built a two-story structure next to Frederick A. Anthony's tin shop. Today a small one-story brick building stands on the site between the Masonic Building and the Schenone Building. For some time McKeany used the old bull ring in Laddsville for a corral; in 1876 he bought the entire city block now containing Carnegie Library and Park for his cattle. He built a large hay barn there, with stabling along the sides; in 1909 the city paid him \$9,000 for the library site, nine times what he had paid for it. McKeany retired in 1910; his butcher shop was torn down in 1929.

In 1875 Pleasanton butcher William Ludwig excavated a "large and commodious cellar under his butcher shop" where he could keep "meats nice and cool for customers." The year before he had won the bid to supply members of the Livermore Grange with beef for the season.

In the 1880s a number of local ranchers—John and Laughlin Moy, John Connelly, the Collier brothers—worked at the Livermore Meat Market. The Collier brothers advertised their fresh beef, veal, mutton, corned meats, pork, bacon, lard in cans, California cured hams, and fresh and bologna sausage in the February 3, 1887 *Herald*. During the December holiday season in that era, the butchers in town put on quite a display to entice customers. The 1897 Christmas Day *Herald* boasted that Frank Fennon's Grand Central Market "outrivals anything of the kind ever attempted in Livermore. ... Fatted calves, young stall-fed steers, porkers, mutton, and lambs are there galore. Upon a raised platform are two huge porkers and their aggregate weight is 1,113 pounds. ... On the center of the table is a miniature snow-covered wagon to which are hitched four roasters. A wee-wee pig attends to the driving. On the sides of the wagon are the words 'Bound for the Klondyke' and 'Grand Central Market.' The meats were dressed by Messrs. Collier and Murray."

On 15 May 1909 an ad in the *Herald* for the California Market on First Street said Frank Fennon was the proprietor and carried "all kinds of fresh salted and smoked meats. This shop has the largest and most complete refrigerating plant in the interior of Alameda County and makes a specialty of its refrigerated meats, acknowledged to be superior in flavor to fresh killed meats."

Henry Moller, after serving an apprenticeship in an Emeryville meat packing plant, came to the Dublin/Pleasanton area to start his own business in 1914. He married Bertha Koopman, a Dublin native. They had three sons: Harold, Lloyd and Roy. There were actually three different buildings, but the last and largest slaughterhouse was built in the 1950s on the west side of Foothill Road on the 200-acre Moller Ranch, now a housing development. After each of the boys graduated from Amador Valley High School, he joined the family business, now called H. Moller & Sons, which packaged and sold meats wholesale. They slaughtered beef, sheep and pigs. During hunting season local hunters often brought their deer to be slaughtered. In the early days, "Pops" Moller, according to an article in the *Herald* "used to drive his meat truck around to farms to sell his cuts. He always had free hot dogs for the kids ... when he pulled into their yards."

Harold's daughter, Linda, remembered the three sons as being much alike in personality; they worked hard together in harmony all their lives. She saw her father, the oldest, as being the leader who was in charge of raising the cattle. Lloyd's main responsibility was farming—growing the hay and grain necessary for feeding the cattle and horses; he was the middle child. The youngest, Roy, worked mostly at the slaughter house although the others worked there, too, when needed.

Jay Bodenhausen, who mans the Safeway fish department in Livermore, recalled that Roy was the quiet one of the three. Gordon Rasmussen, Tassajara rancher, remembered the trust that existed between local ranchers and the Mollers, whom he characterized as "solid people." He could go to the slaughterhouse, for example, at nine o'clock at night when no one was around, weigh a beef carcass on the scale provided, tag it and hang it on a hook. Soon a check would arrive in the mail at the Rasmussen house. "There was never a problem with protocol." Henrietta and Tom Greer, ranchers on Patterson Pass Road, bought day-old bull calves from the San Joaquin County dairies, raised them and sold them to the Mollers.

Many outlets, including Tri-Valley restaurants and markets—for example Fiorio's—as well as Oakland venues such as the Melrose Meat Market and Oakland Meats were customers of the Mollers. Jay remembered the round-ups at the Moller Ranch. A huge crowd attended, many of whom did not participate in the work, but just the celebration that followed. He said that the occasions were legendary; "nobody walked away without a glow." The Moller's business closed in the late 1980s, not long after the local roundups that had ended at the slaughterhouse on Foothill Road became too dangerous on modern roads crowded with vehicles.

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