

Do You Remember?



By Anne Homan

Valley Western Wear: Baughman's and Christesen's

Charles S. Victor was the local manager and partner in Victor and Harris, a Livermore clothing firm he opened with his brother-in-law, Isaac Harris, on October 10, 1881. Their first sale that day was a pair of shoes to Miss Ida Madison. Charles Victor's son, Morris Victor, joined the firm in 1915. Like store owners in many rural communities, Victor and Harris accepted trade goods—for example firewood—as well as cash for their wares. Charles Victor served as a Livermore trustee from 1899 to 1904. John M. "Jack" Baughman began clerking for the business in 1915. By 1922 he had become half-owner, and the firm's name was changed to Victor and Baughman. If you enter Proctor's on First Street and look above the doorway, you will see the old stained glass sign for "Victor & Baughman." In the opinion of the *Herald*, "With the advent of Mr. Baughman as a member of the firm to work with M. Victor the store is now in the hands of two young men who thoroughly understand the needs of the community in the clothing line and will keep the high standard which the store has maintained for the past 40 years." At this time Baughman also bought the house originally built by Nathaniel Holmes at 325 South L Street, where the Baughman family had been living for a number of years. On September 6, 1932, because of the serious illness of Morris Victor, the Victor family sold their company shares to Baughman.

Under Baughman's leadership, the store inventory turned toward western style clothing and boots, and he added an order catalog. The business was operated from various locations on the north side of First Street until 1976 when it was moved to its current location. For more than 40 years the store has advertised its western specialty with the life-size brown painted horse on the sidewalk outside its front door. Perhaps Hazel Peterson Baughman, a native of Livermore, influenced her husband's change in the store inventory because of her love for horses. In the 1950s, she rode and showed her beautiful five-gaited American saddle-bred horses at local horse events. She died in a traffic accident in San Luis Obispo in 1963; Baughman died 10 years later. Anna Siig, who bought Baughman's house, remembered stories of his generosity in extending credit to cowhands and rodeo participants through the years. Several owners succeeded Baughman until Stan Janes bought the store in the late '70s. Janes retired in 1983, and Baughman's Western Outfitters is currently run by his son Rory. Besides western wear, including rack after rack of boots, the store also stocks harnesses.

Two years after Peter Christesen's death in 1972 at age 70, Stan Janes bought what is now Christesen's Western and English Saddlery in Pleasanton. Christesen came to Pleasanton in 1924 from Denmark and worked briefly at the Hansen and Orloff Dairy before going into retail merchandising. In 1929, with partner and fellow Dane, Andrew Greve, he expanded into a new terra cotta brick store built expressly for their business at 633 Main Street, where they sold shoes such as Buster Brown and Keds, Arrow shirts, Paramount pants, Holeproof hosiery and various work clothes. They advertised Levi Strauss's "Two Horse Jeans" at \$1.75. At times Christesen did carpenter work and also served as Pleasanton's first building inspector for 21 years. Soon after 1930, he married Daphne Peters, a Pleasanton native and descendant of Agostin Bernal. He cast the adobe bricks himself for their home on Happy Valley Road.

At first the clothing store was between a furniture store at 629 Main and the Lincoln Theater. Later, Christesen bought the furniture store and expanded his business into both buildings. Perhaps by this time he had bought out Greve since the business was now called Christesen's Men's and Boys' Wear. He filled in the carriage-way between the two shops to create the Tack Room, "a wonderful storehouse of saddles and soaps and leather smells." The column "Round the Town" in the *Pleasanton Times* described Christesen: "He knew his horseflesh. But he was more interested in how to keep them healthy, or the riders properly attired, than he was in win, place or show." The columnist quoted a close friend—"Pete is the only smart horseman I ever knew. He put his money on the rider." Donna Bettencourt, who currently works at the store, pointed out to me that the place where the jeans are displayed used to be the spot for the saddlery. She remembered that a truck left the store every day for the race track with supplies during fair time. The store's exterior sign display still includes "Turf Supplies" and "Saddlery." Bettencourt recalled that banks used to close at 3:30, and Christesen would help out local ranch workers and horsemen who got off from work later in the day by cashing their paychecks without any charge for the service. The "Round the Town" columnist noted, "He was always the 'first touch' for the high school paper's ad, or tickets to the soccer game." Owner Rory Janes continues to sell western wear and tack at his stores in Pleasanton and Livermore.

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