

Do You Remember?



By Anne Homan

A STRONG CHARACTER

Born in 1855 in Maine, William Pitt Bartlett left as a young man to learn the printing business in Boston, Philadelphia and San Francisco. At age 22 he came to Livermore, bought the bankrupt Livermore newspaper the *Enterprise* and renamed it *The Livermore Herald* on February 1, 1877. The *Herald* office was on First Street between George W. Langan's law office and the old town hall and firehouse building still standing at the southeast corner of McLeod and First. At the top of the *Herald's* front page was the motto, "Independent in all things, neutral in nothing."

Bartlett was six foot four, a heavily built man with a close-clipped beard: "If you see a grizzly bear coming down the street, that's Mr. Bartlett." He usually wore a derby hat and a white shirt with stiff collar and cuffs.

According to local historian Gary Drummond, Bartlett "worked tirelessly to advertise the valley's agricultural and economic possibilities." In 1878 he published a 40-page pamphlet that extolled the advantages of the Livermore Valley and encouraged people to settle here. Bartlett showed his concern for the environment by advocating plowing stubble under instead of burning fields. He encouraged the spreading of gravel over local dirt roads.

He had hundreds of black locust trees planted along city streets and beside country roads leading to town; this tree was chosen because of its ability to survive without irrigation. The locust trees still lining North Livermore Avenue north of I-580 are the best remaining examples of his work. Recognizing the growing scarcity of firewood, Bartlett also had flats of 100 blue gum eucalyptus seedlings delivered to the *Herald* office and offered the seedlings to ranchers.

Bartlett's policy of publishing new construction permits and other real estate news in the newspaper has endeared him to local historians and genealogists. He himself bought and sold real estate in Livermore.

In 1884 he married Anna C. Laumeister, whose family ran the Livermore flourmill; the Bartletts lived in the two-story clapboard house that still stands at the southeast corner of South Livermore Avenue and Fifth Street. They called each other Mr. and Mrs. Bartlett.

Under Bartlett's aegis, the *Herald* was published for the most part as a weekly. Munro-Fraser's *History of Alameda County* described Bartlett in 1883: "a vigorous writer, who has in addition to his work on the paper, published considerable statistical, descriptive, and historical matter regarding Livermore Valley." Bartlett was a member of the Pacific Coast Press Association and occasionally contributed pieces to San Francisco newspapers.

In 1886 he acquired the first steam cylinder-printing machine in Alameda County outside of Oakland. A fire in Livermore on September 6, 1891 destroyed the newspaper office building and printing plant. Although he restored the business, Bartlett sold the *Herald* to Arthur Henry in 1899 and moved to Porterville in Tulare County, where he invested in mining enterprises and became known as the "Magnesite King."

He loved the California mountains and frequently traveled through the Coast Range and the Sierra. He and Anna had a home, Green Acres, on Sunnyside Avenue in Porterville as well as a mountain cottage, Tumbling Waters, at California Hot Springs. Bartlett and others planted pepper trees, acacia, olive, and palm trees along Sunnyside Avenue. Bartlett retired from mining in 1921. The Bartletts had bought an orange grove, and this project took up much of his time.

Bartlett was named in 1960 to the California Newspaper Hall of Fame, which honored him as a community builder, publisher, author, mining man, nature lover: "William Pitt Bartlett of the *Livermore Herald* represents the important power and community leadership that should be the goal of all small city newspaper publishers." On a visit to Livermore in 1928, he recalled, "When I started the *Livermore Herald* in 1877, I had just cast my first vote; and Norris D. Dutcher, whose business career began the same week, and I were the youngest business men in the town. ... As I look back now, it doesn't appear to have been much of a newspaper, compared with those of today. There were really no big papers then, judged from our present standpoint. A Washington hand-press, a Gordon jobber, and 25 fonts of type made the bulk of the equipment."

After leaving Livermore, Bartlett never returned to the newspaper business. He lived in Porterville for 27 years until his death in 1929; Anna had died in 1923. They had no children. Bartlett served as a member of the Tulare County forestry board from its establishment, and a Porterville city park was named in his honor. Beginning in 1925, he offered scholarship awards anonymously to sixth, seventh, eighth and twelfth grade students, and a Porterville junior high and elementary school are named for him.

Porterville flags flew at half-mast and the town stores closed to pay respect to Bartlett on the day of his funeral; a motorcycle escort accompanied the cortege to the Home of Peace Cemetery, where he was laid to rest beside his wife. His gravestone reads: "A clear mind. A strong character. A friend of youth." *The Livermore Herald* has continued on under various owners and editors.

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