

Historical Ramblings

The Fabing-McKay-Spanne House is an imposing two-story Victorian farmhouse sitting majestically at the corner of L Street and Walnut Avenue. The home was constructed by Henry Wadsworth Fabing in 1875 as the first two-story wooden residence in the newly formed town of Lompoc. California redwood, the preferred building material of the time, was transported by steamship from northern California to Pt. Sal, where it was tossed overboard to wash ashore for retrieval. After its arrival in town by horse and wagon, the lumber was left to dry and be prepared for the home's construction.

The Fabings owned farmland in the lower valley and continued to live at that location with their five children, leaving the large Victorian structure empty until 1887. By the time they moved in, most of the children were grown. Dubbed "Fabing's Folly" by local townspeople, the huge home, surrounded by acres of farmland, illustrated Mr. Fabing's faith in the abundance of the Lompoc Valley. Other settlers soon followed his lead, building more substantial homes throughout the valley.

Mr. Fabing was a blacksmith, farmer, wagon and carriage maker and race horse fancier and volunteer fireman. The now absent cupola atop the house provided him a lookout point from which he could survey the entire valley.

In 1902, the Fabings sold the home to W.S. McKay, who was a farmer on a large scale, wharfinger at the Lompoc Landing Wharf, and an agent for the Pacific Steamship Company. Mr. Fabing had left the home's upstairs unfinished, accessible only by a ladder. Since the McKays required additional room to accommodate their six daughters, they created four rooms from the upstairs expanse and an elegant staircase that greeted visitors as they entered the front door.

After Mr. McKay's death, Mrs. McKay sold the property to Nis and Karen Spanne in 1910. Mr. Spanne was a blacksmith, whose business was located in the 200 block of West Ocean Avenue, across the alley from Chalkrock building that he and his brothers had constructed in 1892 on South I Street. The Spannes had eight children, the last two being born in the house.

After Mrs. Spanne's death in 1966, the Lompoc Valley Historical Society was informed the house was to be demolished. The organization sprang into action, negotiating the purchase of the property with the Spanne family in 1969. Since that time, the home has been completely renovated and furnished in the style of the Victorian era, providing visitors with a glimpse of the lifestyle of that time. "The home always was a happy one," according to Myra Manfrina of the Lompoc Valley Historical Society. "Several babies were born in the house, and it was always bustling with activity and lots of kids," she added. Although four deaths occurred in the home, the abundant happy times outshone the somber ones.

Happy times were once again prevalent last week as students from Cabrillo High School's Drama Department, Choir and Madrigals provided "Living History Night" in the home. Some 30 students, wearing period costumes, occupied each of the home's ten rooms, portraying Victorian era characters preparing for a Christmas party in the formal front parlor. Tours were conducted every 20 minutes under the leadership of students who advised participants that they were stepping back in time and could not be seen nor heard by the inhabitants of the house.

Comments heard after the event ranged from, "Simply delightful," to "When will you do this again?" and "This is the best thing that's ever happened in this house."

What made the event most meaningful was that it was the Senior project of Lili Rauh, great-granddaughter of Nis and Karen Spanne, the last owners of the home. Lili drew on family experiences, as well as her interest in the house as a Spanne descendant to develop a story line for her classmates to follow. And follow it they did, with improvised scenes that became better with each tour. Thanks, of course, goes to all of the students and parents involved and especially to Lili for breathing life into the home and providing a unique peek into the past.