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# Davenport Fourth Of July Milestone

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In this nation of unsettled families — when many Americans are emigrants in their own land — the Gregorys of Davenport have belonged to an earlier age when a man's children's children stay on: settling the family roots ever deeper into the home soil.

The family has reached a milestone this Fourth of July as it celebrates the 50th anniversary of Gregory's Country Store in Davenport.

It is also a milestone in the lives of Alvin and Francis Gregory, as the anniversary comes at a time when the second of the two brothers is

soon to go into retirement and let the store pass from the hands of the family.

The brothers — businessmen, family men and civic leaders of the solitary and wildly magnificent north coast area — have carried the family line into the fourth generation in the north county and expanded and continued the business their father founded on July 4, 1925.

The father, one of the early visionaries of the automobile's destiny in America, built Gregory's gas station while he was still working at the Santa Cruz and Portland Cement Co., founded in Davenport in 1906.

Albert Gregory, the first native - born member of the Gregory family, was the son of

French - Canadian immigrants Joseph and Ann Gregory who came to the Ben Lomond area in 1886 from Quebec.

They farmed the Santa Cruz Mountain lands, tended a vineyard and cut timber to make their living.

Albert, born in 1883, was the first child of seven.

He moved from the farm when he reached manhood, settled in the Bonny Doon area in 1906 and from there moved to Davenport in 1919.

He was an engineer on the train that shuttled limestone from the Bonny Doon quarries to the cement plant in Davenport.

He married Elvetzia Rosselli, a girl born in Marin County who

came to be known as "Mom Gregory" during a lifetime of work and public service in Davenport.

When Alvin was eight and Francis four, their father commissioned the contracting firm of Palmer and Belsigga to build him a 20 by 20 foot building and contracted with Standard Oil and Shell Oil to pump gasoline to the few cars bumping along Highway 1.

"In those days it was a dirt road, mostly used by farmers taking their produce in horse-drawn wagons to the Southern Pacific depot in Davenport," Alvin recalled.

Gregory's gas station opened on July 4, 1925.

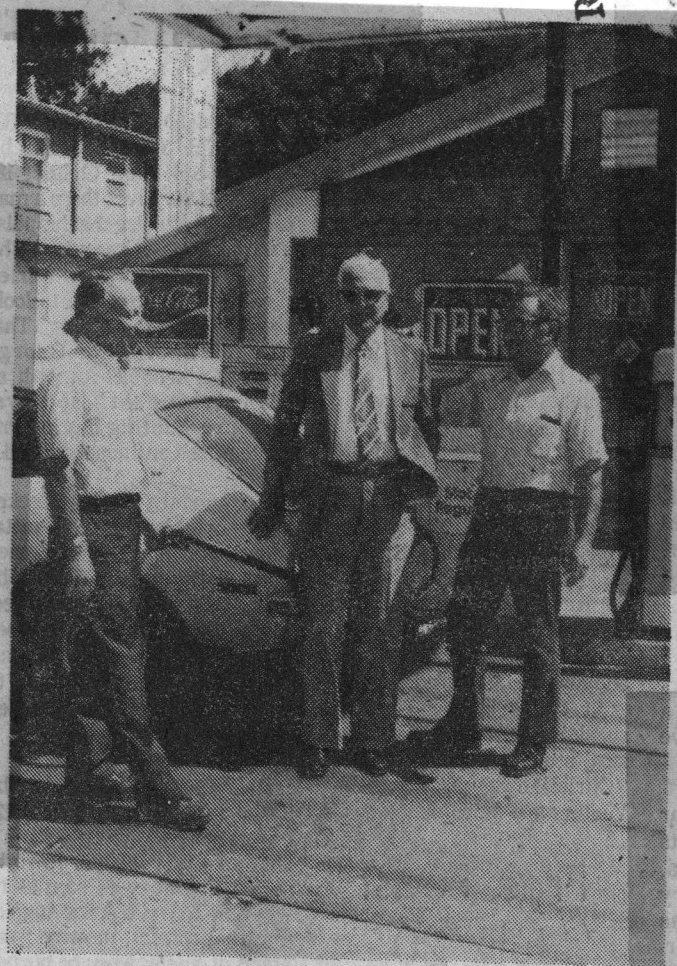
"I'll never forget that day," Alvin said, "father bought a lot of fireworks and we shot rockets off over the ocean."

And he remembered, "I pumped the first gallon of gasoline we sold."

"I had to stand on a wooden powder box from the cement plant, and the first gallon was sold to Roy C. Morelli at 18 cents a gallon."

Morelli today is a spry 78 year old, and the Gregory brothers invited him back to Davenport this week and, in commemoration of the anniversary, pumped him a full tank of gas — free. Cost per gallon, at last

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The man in the center, Roy C. Morelli, was the first customer to get gasoline at Gregory's Country Store back on July 4, 1925. Last week, he was invited back for a free tankful of gas by Francis, left, and Alvin Gregory, the brothers who took over their father's service station in 1947 and built it into a country store.

each prices, was 34.7 cents a gallon.

Morelli in 1925 was the station master at the SP depot in Davenport and was driving a Chevrolet touring car.

Beginning around 1925, the automobile world began gearing up its production and more and more varieties of horseless - carriages began streaming down Highway 1.

"At one time, we had over 30 makes listed on our service charts," Alvin said.

These cars included the Essex, Flint, Willis Knight, Graham Page, Hupmobile, Duesenberg, Star, Oakland which looked like a Buick, and the Eddie Rickenbacker automobile with its insignia of a hat in a ring, symbolizing Rickenbacker's seeking of public office in that era.

The first pumps were filled with Standard regular gasoline under the name of "Red Crown Gasoline" and Shell premium.

The pumps were mechanical — like a pump used to get well water — and "they should be in the Smithsonian Institute by now," Francis commented.

He joined the working force at the station when he was 13 years old, "and that's one reason I want to follow Alvin into retirement: 40 years is too long in the same business."

The gasoline was delivered in a truck that rode on solid - rubber tires and carried the petroleum in five - gallon cans.

As the driver would pour the gas out, he would keep track of the number of cans emptied by moving washers — such as are used on bolts — from one pile to another, Alvin said.

"It would take him 45 minutes to deliver 300 gallons of gas, and now we get 8,000 gallons delivered in 20 minutes," Francis commented.

In 1933, father Alvin went away to a maritime academy and subsequently stayed with shipping until after the war. Gregory's service station switched gasoline companies and started buying from Gilmore Oil Co.

Gilmore gas not only acted like a tiger in the tank, but its advertising campaign — including the broadcasting of a circus every Friday night — came on like a lion.

In fact, the company had a travelling live lion that was taken from station to station to titillate the public and whenever the king of beasts came to Davenport it was a day off school for the kids.

The company sold three types of gasoline: Blue - Green regular, Fleet White unleaded and Red Lion premium.

Blue - Green was famous because it was the subject of the longest song ever written.

The company had a campaign going that solicited lyrics from its radio audience and each week a new stanza would be added to the song.

Blue - green was the color of the gas, the Gregorys remembered, and probably it was the color of thousands of radio listeners identified upon hearing such stuff as "You'll go so fast, you'll never get passed, if you fill 'er up with Blue - Green gas."

Later on Gilmore sold to a company which later was purchased by Mobil and the brothers have a 40 year

then present gas company. Also in 1933, Albert Gregory added 20 feet in length to the gasoline station and put in a lunch counter and 11 stools to feed the hungry men who spent 1934 in building the Davenport pier.

Alvin came home in 1940 and married Dolly Demos, a Davenport girl. They have had two children, now grown and living lives of their own away from the Davenport store and other holdings where the brothers have acquired in their lifetimes.

Both brothers went off to war, Alvin in the merchant marine and Francis in the Air Force.

When Francis came home, he married Hazel Vita, a Mt. Shasta girl, in 1946 and they have three grown children; none living in Davenport.

The brothers took over the station and lunch counter in 1947 and carried on the business during the bustling and prosperous years following World War II.

In 1957, the expanded another 20 feet in length and added 20 feet in a second story to the building — which now serves as Alvin's north coast office.

Father Albert and "Mom Gregory" died in the 1960s.

They built the market into the hodge - podge of goods that makes a good general store.

"People come in now and tell us, 'hey, this is really what a store should be,'" Francis said.

It does hold just about everything from soup to nuts, and it serves as a daily "hello" stop for the residents of Davenport.

The store, and the brothers Gregory, are also the north coast weather station, and if you dial for the Davenport Fire Department and Rescue Squad, the first voice to answer the phone is that of someone at the country store.

Alvin served as a county supervisor for eight years, and Francis was the Davenport fire chief when he was in high school — perhaps the youngest fire chief in the state's history.

The country store sells fish and game licenses — a service that fits right into the atmosphere of the place.

"In a small way, we've filled the holes left by the burning down of the Davenport Cash Store about 16 years ago and the burning of the Ocean View Hotel 11 years ago," Francis said.

They both insisted that store workers Rose Domenichelli and Steve Hewitt be given credit for the friendly atmosphere of the store.

"But, it's time we let it go," Francis said, "Alvin retired a couple of years ago, and now I'm ready to let it go."

Four generations held fast to their life in the north county — it gave a farm and home to the grandparents, provided a business for the son of the immigrants, and a way of life to the grandsons and their young children who have left and seek their fortunes elsewhere.

Fourth of July will be a celebration for the Gregorys, but it will also be a rite of passage in the family's history.