

## This Place Matters

By Susan Blake, Historic Preservation Board



The seventh featured Landmark home is the Louis and Edward Genasci House at 207 N. Central Ave. It is located in one of the earliest sections of the original Benjamin Campbell family land holdings.

Likely built around 1900, it is a one-story rural California Farmhouse style cottage with some Queen Anne and Greek Revival accents that many home builders added. The steeply pitched roof and wide shiplap siding showcase the boxed cornices, and long double hung sash windows with molded cross pieces. In the 1930's, the previously open front porch was enclosed to make a sun porch. The original two-story wood frame, two door barn still sits at the back of this property and can be seen from the street.

Louis Genasci Sr. immigrated to the United States from Switzerland in 1885. In 1893, he married his wife Albina at the Mission San Luis Obispo, according to a story in the [San Jose Mercury Herald](#). The Genasci family arrived in Campbell in 1911, and opened a thriving grocery and general merchandise store in the new downtown business district, on Campbell Ave. Their

sons, Ed and Louis Jr. were the delivery boys while Louis Sr. and Albina ran the store. The family became well known for their many civic contributions to the community.



From: Campbell Inter Urban Press, August 23, 1912.

The town was very concerned about not having any fire protection after two big homes burned down between 1896 and 1902. In June of 1913, the town fathers including Louis Genasci Sr. decided to establish a volunteer fire department. However, the volunteers immediately faced significant challenges. Thirteen hydrants were installed on a few of the new downtown streets but the water pressure was inconsistent. Funding for equipment such as hoses, hooks and ladders, buckets and a hand pulled chemical "fire engine" were not available. The volunteers bought their own badges for about \$1.00.

Ed Genasci, who later became chief of the volunteers, was designated coupler of the hose company when the new fire department started. According to Jeanette Watson's book, Campbell the Orchard City, the volunteers were called to fires by the ringing of the church bells in those early days. This proved to be a problem on Sundays, because folks were also called to worship with ringing of the church bells. In 1914, a fire bell was purchased from the city of San Jose for \$40.

After a disastrous fire took out many of the businesses on Campbell Avenue at First Street in October of 1917, voters passed a resolution to create a formal fire district, but funding was still

hard to come by. It was still a volunteer fire department and they would raise funds by washing down buildings as part of their fire drills and the owners gave them donations.

According to local reports, in 1935, Louis Genasci Sr. fell off his bicycle into a mud hole on his way to a fire at 2 a.m. on a rainy morning. The volunteer fire department had recently become "bicyclized" so they could get to the fires more quickly and if needed, cut through the orchards and hoist their bikes over fences. They became famous as newspapers started writing stories about the "Fire Laddies" in the "Bicycle Fire Department". Even Paramount and Universal Pictures came to shoot a news reel.

Ed Genasci served as Chief of the Campbell Volunteer fire department from 1919 until 1941. Later he served as a civilian deputy Fire Chief for the US Naval Sailing Association during WWII.

In the early 1970's, Ed donated a treasure trove of saved items from his family's old store to the Campbell Historic Museum. Included were loaded display cases, signage, a merchant's apron, canned goods and merchandise. Now, all of it is on display in an exhibit at the Museum, at 51 N. Central Avenue in Downtown Campbell.