



History
Lives Here

PAJARO VALLEY Historical Association

Spring 2023

Watsonville Has Seen Its Fair Share of Floods

This article is a re-print of one Betty Lewis wrote for her “That Was Watsonville” column for the *Pajaronian*. The original article was published on February 26, 2004. Lewis was a local, Watsonville historian, a contributing columnist for the *Register-Pajaronian*, and a key member in PVHA’s archives.

There have been many floods in Watsonville down through the years. A few of the most notable were in 1911, 1922, 1931, 1937, 1939, and 1955. But let’s go back to January of 1890 when an article in the *Pajaronian* was titled “The Great Flood.”

The article went on to say:

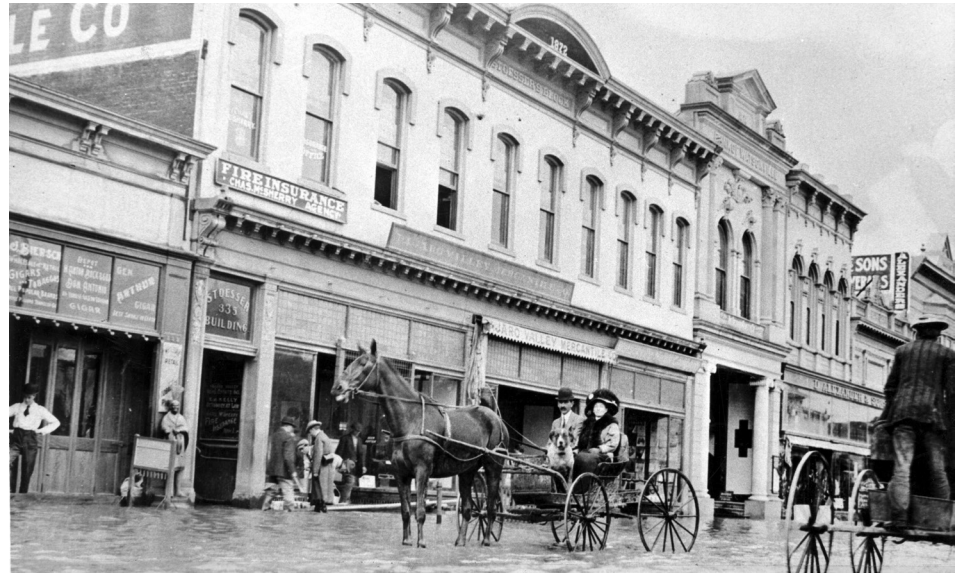
“There may have been wetter winters than the one we are trying to outlast. There may have been floods in the Pajaro within forty years that surpassed that of Saturday night, but the *Pajaronian* is satisfied with the most recent experience in the storm and flood line, and it is not desirous of seeking anything severer.”

The Salsipuedes (*get out if you can*) Creek swept over its banks and the water came down First Street to Main and the overflow flooded portions of the eastern part of town. Meanwhile, the Pajaro River was racing to Rodriguez Street, sweeping away fences. Over the river in Chinatown, the water flooded the houses and poured through Porter’s Grove near the John T. Porter house.

Out at Camp Goodall (now Pajaro Dunes), the hotel and cottages were flooded, ruining furniture and bedding. Inside the hotel, the water rose to the top of the sitting room fireplace and covered the piano. “The present mouth of the river is fully half a mile nearer to Camp Goodall than the old one.

Railroad tracks and bridges took a fearful beating and

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Mr. and Mrs. William O'Brien ride through the water in their buggy circa 1910. To the left is Biersch's Cigar Store.

Your Waters Once Ran Wild

Your waters once ran wild across the land,
pursuing varied pathways to the sea;
until we broke your flow to our command,
and since then neither of us has been free.

We exercised our engineering art...
an earthen wall divorced your land from ours.
Like neighbors in a feud we dwelt apart;
we in our barrios, you in your bowers.
One day you rose and brushed away the wall,
while all our leaders argued policies.
And now from many structures great and small,
we shovel out our muddied memories.
We'll venture to repair these works of men,
until you come to visit again.

(In memory of the Pajaro flood)

*The above sonnet from the Steve Bankhead Collection
was submitted to the 1995 Santa Cruz County Fair.
It won second prize*

Floods

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much of the valley's good farming land was swept away by the onrushing flood. The local butchers also took a beating. They had moved all their animals to Goodwin's slaughterhouse near Brooklyn. When the storm hit, they had to move all the stock animals to the uplands. It was estimated that the loss to the Pajaro Valley by flooding with amount to some \$15,000, including damage to personal property, businesses, farmers, railroad tracks, roads and bridges.

In January of 1939, the following appeared in the Watsonville Morning Sun newspaper: "High Water Again Marks Main Street...The water spread across sidewalks, particularly on the eastside of the street. Lakes were created at the Third Street and



Granite Construction's crane on the Main Street bridge moving debris to the other side of the bridge to allow the water to flow during the flood of December 23, 1955.

East Lake Avenue intersections...At the Bank of America (then located in the Lettunich building) a car was driven up on the sidewalk to take out employees."

The flood of December 1955 was one of the worst ever when Watsonville received over five inches

of rain. The Veteran's Hall was used as an evacuation headquarters, as well as temporary living quarters for 34 soldiers from Fort Ord. The Pajaro River reached a height of 33.2 feet. Little hard to imagine such a thing today! 🦉

PVHA

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of the Greater Pajaro Valley
Established 1940
Incorporated 1956**

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The Floods

What Can Be Done About Preventing Them?

By Bill Beecher

Everyone is wringing their hands about the recent floods, wondering what can be done about preventing them. This occurs roughly every ten years or so. Each time, there is a cry to fix the problem.

Going through The Pajaro Valley Historical Association records there is one repeated conclusion: keep the riverbeds clear of debris. It is the debris that causes most of the problems. The debris is accompanied by silt that builds up and raises the river bed leading to premature flooding. It also

causes the water flow to create strong eddies that erode the river banks.

The river and creek beds are kept clean for several years after a flood and then everyone forgets about keeping them clean. Then the build up of debris and silt begins. Ten years later when the next big rains occur we have a repeat of history.

The problem is not just the main rivers, but also the tributaries that flow into them, all streams need to be kept clean of debris. Tributary debris is a big factor for the river beds. When

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Watsonville Plaza at the intersection of Union Street and Peck Street around 1901. Visible are the Mansion House, IOOF Building, and Opera House.

Watsonville Plaza Revitalization

By Ralph Jacobs

Watsonville historian Betty Lewis wrote “Don Sebastian Rodriguez owned the land grant, Bolsa del Pajaro, on which the city of Watsonville now rests. Some historians say he gave the area now known as the City Plaza to the people of Watsonville in 1860, but Sebastian died in 1855 and his will says nothing about the plaza. There are reports that he deeded it over before his death and others say his heirs donated the land.”

In 1868 the Watsonville town trustees filed a legal notice to fence the plaza. Receiving no objection, the plaza was fenced and then thereafter claimed as the property of Watsonville. In 2010 the city of Watsonville hired a professional land title examiner to search the public record concerning the condition of title to the Watsonville town plaza. The search found no title of record dedicating any part of the plaza. In a 1908 newspaper article, the writer stated “the city simply squatted on the plaza and claimed it and no one disputed the claim.”

Whatever the legal ramifications,

the plaza has been used and abused. Cattle once grazed on the weeds and grass. In 1966, it was proposed that 76 auto parking spots be constructed on the plaza.

The first bandstand was built of wood in 1880. It was replaced in 1906 by the current bandstand which was designed by William H. Weeks. The current top was installed in 1965. The bandstand suffered structural damages in the 1989 earthquake, preventing its further use. The main fountain was dedicated in 1880.

In 2020 the city completed its

strategic plan for Parks, which included a master plan for the city plaza. All key features of the plaza will be retained. Plaza improvements include seismic retrofit and refurbishment of the bandstand, repaving all existing pathways, refurbishment of the main fountain, improved electrical infrastructure, installation of a low level permanent stage facing Main Street, and ADA accessible areas. As part of the plaza improvements, a new self-cleaning two-wvstall restroom facility has been installed.

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Rope pulling contest in the Watsonville Plaza on July 4th, 1914.



Gabriel and Marela Duran, fascinated by the Watsonville Plaza fountain (undated).



Assembly of people in the Watsonville Plaza to honor the 1st Watsonville Contingent to World War I circa 1916. At the time, the bandstand featured a glass roof, which was colloquially called the “Butterfly Roof.”

Plaza

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Existing trees will be maintained, including three historical trees. Other historical elements, i.e. cannons and the drinking fountain near Main Street, will be retained. Historical informational signage will be placed in key locations near the

historical elements.

The city was awarded a \$2.7 million grant from the state of California Parks and Recreation Department which will serve as the primary source of funding for the project. The estimated completion date is mid-2025. Through the entire process,

PVHA contributed to the planning and the design phases, and was a committee member for the selection of a landscape architectural design consultant to develop a conceptual design, prepare construction documents, and provide management services during construction. 🌿



Tom Mix's Hat

By Claudia Mize

Remember the old time western movies? Tom Mix was a cowboy actor in films from 1909–1935—mostly silent films. Pictured here is his cowboy hat modeled by Bill Beecher, PVHA volunteer. The hat was donated recently by Peter de la Fontaine, grandson of Louis Lopes, a Watsonville resident. The hat was given to

Louis at a Kiwanis meeting in the 1930s where Tom Mix was speaking. Mr. Lopes arrived late and saw the hat on a table. He put on the hat and went in to the meeting. He was immediately fined for wearing a hat in the meeting. Then, Tom Mix said if he liked the hat he could have it. 🌿

The Pajaro Valley's Changing Make Up

By Bill Beecher

For the last year, we in the Archive have been going through the 1860, 1870, 1900 and 1930 censuses. There are many surprises that we uncovered. We would like to share them with you. The two earliest census analyses were done by Regan Huerta and the second two by Tina Baine.

The Pajaro Valley has grown from a combination of equal parts of immigrants and people from other states. Their children account for half of the growth over that seventy-year time frame. The initial immigrants were Irish and many of our streets have Irish names. However, the Irish stopped immigrating, and they became a small part of our diverse ethnic makeup.

The Chinese were the next major immigrant group, and by 1900 were the single largest immigrant population. They were accompanied by the Japanese, who became the second largest immigrant population in 1900. However, by 1930, the Chinese were all but gone and the Japanese continued to increase.

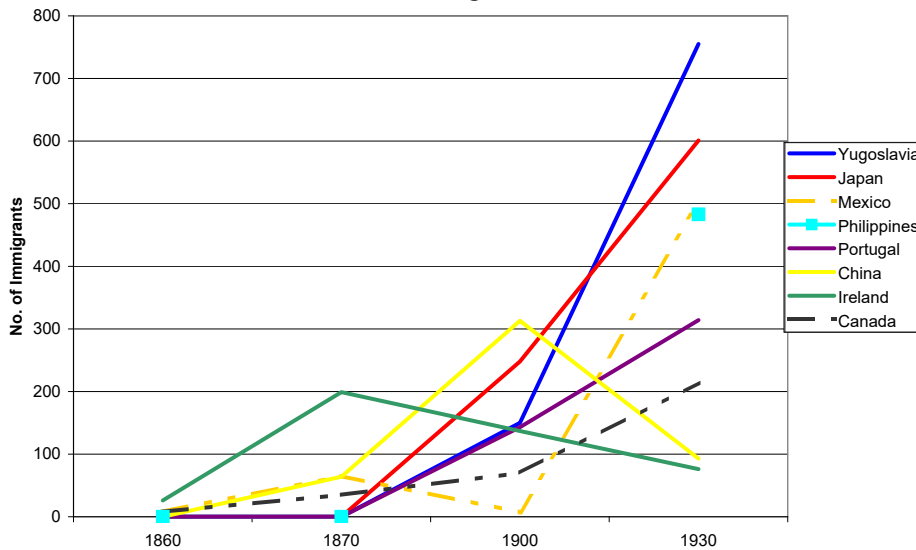
In the mean time, the Croatians also came in the late 1800s, becoming the largest ethnic group in 1930. In the early 1900s, Mexicans began to arrive in numbers along with Filipinos. The Filipinos became major field workers during that time. Their drive to unionize in the late 1920s led to race riots here in Watsonville and elsewhere in the state.

With the Chinese being the exception, new immigrants hired themselves out and saved some of their money, which they used to buy some of the poorer farm land. As they grew their farms, they reinvested in buying better land that was more productive. It is a process repeated over and over in the Pajaro Valley.

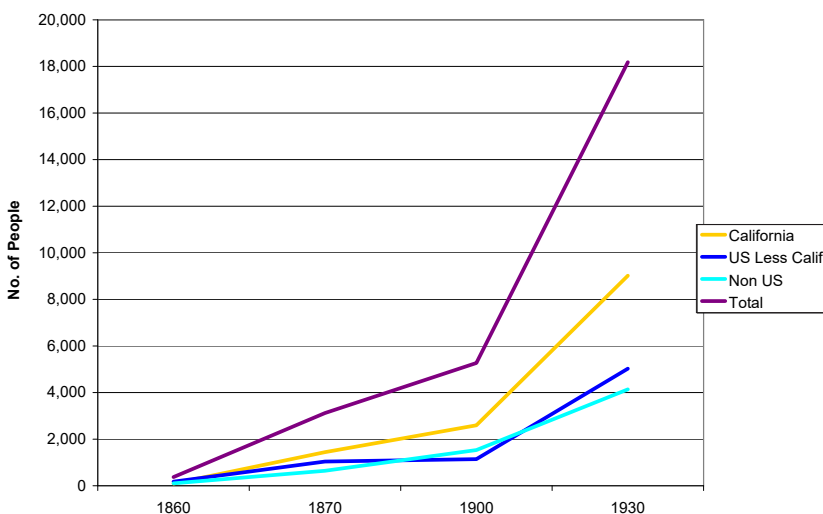
Asians had a tougher go. The Asian Exclusion Act prevented them from leasing, or buying, or share cropping. Mr. Sakata found a way around this and incorporated his family with the American-born children, holding 51 percent of the corporation and the parents 49 percent. This allowed them to buy land and become a major force in the strawberry business.

Our valley has rich soil that has allowed many people, Americans and foreigners, to be successful, to realize the American dream. Probably nowhere in the United States has experienced what we have here. 🌱

Pajaro Valley Census 1860–1930
Birth Place of Immigrants



Pajaro Valley Census 1860–1930
Birth Place of All Inhabitants





Memorials

*In Honor of **Dixie Arns:**
For her love of the flowers*
• Jeri Striegel

Marvin Byers

• Lon and Annamarie Dugger

Sharon Carmichael

• Louis and Geneva Ivanovich

Barbara Corrigan

• Jim and Shirley Spain

Arthur Eaton

• Jim and Shirley Spain

Shirley and Gene Friend

• Ed and Kathy Banks

Linda Gordon

• Lon and Annamarie Dugger

Mas Hashimoto

• Marcia Hashimoto

Edward Hedgpeth

• Jim and Shirley Spain

Harald Jensen

• Carl and Fran Dobler
• Louis and Geneva Ivanovich

Mike Larkin

• Jim and Shirley Spain

John A. Lukrich

• Louis and Geneva Ivanovich
• Ken and Anne Dobler
• Carl and Fran Dobler
• Gayle and Elizabeth Ivanovich
• Jeff and Karen Kane
• Dr. and Mrs. Clifford Leong

Judy Doering Nielsen

• Gino Stefanni

Honoring

Murial Hauer Stienne

• Claire Etienne

Dave Toriumi

• Jim and Shirley Spain
• Louis and Geneva Ivanovich



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Archive Fund

• Ken and Anne Dobler

Garden Fund

• Ron and Connie Deller
• Ken and Anne Dobler
• Jeri Striegel

General

• Dan Carrillo
• William and Cloy Codiga
• Mabel Cole
• Claire Etienne
• Rocky and Judy Franich
• Jeffery and Lisa Rosendale
• John Ruso
• Brandon and Trisha O'Conner Kett



Welcome

New Members

• Bill and Pat Barton
• Robert Brownell
• Ward and Gloria Garing
• LeeAnne McDermott
• Dr. Brooke Raines
• Rowland and Patricia Rebele
• Kathy Kralj Scott
• Robert Sudden
• Elisa Trujillo



Welcome

New Volunteers

• Angelina Demetry (House)
• Margaret Loos (Newsletter)
• Elisa Trujillo (Garden)

Ways to Donate

- Become a member.
- Upgrade your membership level.
- Make a general donation to the PVHA.
- Make a donation to our endowment funds: The Historic Preservation Fund or Archive Fund, both established at the Community Foundation.



Membership Renewals

November

• Doug and Noris Anderson
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• Lynn Clough
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• Mark and Cathy Lauesen
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• Mark and Karen Sambrailo
• Helen Ukestad
• Bob Wall/Grunsky Law Firm
• Lorraine Washington
• Pill and Shaz Ybarra

December

• Chuck and Ramona Allen
• Peter and Kristy Bobeda
• Anna Marie Dugger
• Scott and Jodi Frensley
• Ron Gordon
• Donald and Diana Henrichsen
• Rod and Penny Hudson
• Jeff and Karen Kane
• Lawrence Lease
• Clifford and Linda Leong
• June Ivelich Pierce
• Jeffery and Lisa Rosendale
• John Ruso
• Tony Scurich
(Scurich Insurance Services)
• Patricia Stepovich
• Robert Sudden



Membership Renewals

January

- Agricultural History Project
- Emmanuel Brion and Luann Lauesen
- Daniel and Patricia Davis
- Nancy Ruiz DePuy
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- Rosa Guerra
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- Clint and Karen Miller
- Bill and Karen Moncovich
- JoAnn Petznick
- Barney and Marlene Radovich
- Kathleen Reynolds

- Nate Scurich
- Susan Scurich
- Alex Solano
- Jim and Shirley Spain
- Gino Stefanni
- Art and Mary Jean Wagner

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- Ed and Kathy Banks
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- John Espinoza
- Frank and Loretta Estrada
- Joyce Kalich
- Donn Marinovich and Sherrin Grout
- Terry Locke-Paddon
- Jan Onufray
- Billie Jean Sorensen

March

- Betty Bachan
- Karen Bachan
- Jeanette Crosetti
- Bridget Fairhurst
- Marilyn Hyde
- Patricia Johns
- Brandon and Trisha Kett
- Kenny Kusumoto
- Antoinette Lukrich
- Tamia Marg
- Arlene Okamoto Minami
- Kathy Moe
- Kathy Moresco
- Eugene Valla

Email Your Newsletter?

PVHA would like to know if you would prefer your newsletter emailed? If so, please send your email address to info@pajarovalleyhistory.org and ask to put you on our newsletter email list.



*Want to join now or need to renew?
We'd love to have you become a member of PVHA.*



Membership Form

New Member Renewal: Membership Expiration Date _____

Donor \$50 Supporter \$100 Benefactor \$250 Patron \$500 Corporate \$ _____

Other Donation \$ _____ to be used for _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Total Enclosed \$ _____

We also accept VISA and Mastercard

Please make checks payable to PVHA

P.O. Box 623 • Watsonville, CA 95077

Or join via our website at www.pajarovalleyhistory.org

All contributions are tax deductible within the meaning of Section 501 (c)(3)
of the Internal Revenue Code—Tax ID 94-1663161



Preventing The Floods

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the heavy rains come it moves the debris from the tributaries onto the debris that has already built up in the river bottoms.

It seems that the first attention goes to fixing the levees rather than the debris; they have focused on the effect not the cause. To be cynical, the politicians are more interested in spending our tax dollars on where the voters are, currying their votes, rather than on where the revenue dollars are generated in the counties. With that in mind, tax dollars should be set aside for yearly funds to be spent on keeping the stream beds cleared of debris. If the stream beds have been cleared, and there are funds left over each year, then those dollars can be put into the general fund. Remember what happened to our gasoline tax dollars when they were put into the general fund. When there is money, history teaches us that the politicians will use it to buy votes. Do not let that happen. 🌿



Man in his galoshes in his shoe-shining chair on Main Street between Maple and Central during the February 12, 1938 flood.

Looking for 2023 Flood Photos

PVHA is looking for high resolution photos of the 2023 floods, for our collections. Contact us at info@pajarovalleyhistory.org.



Saturday, July 1, 2023

11:00 am to 3:00 pm
with Buffet Lunch

Catered by Carmona's
and Keynote

from Miles Reiter,
CEO of Driscoll's



Tickets: \$45.

No tickets sold at the door.

Pay by check or online by
June 20, 2023.

Call 831.722.0305 or send
check to PVHA, P.O. Box 623,
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Buy tickets online at www.pajarovalleyhistory.org.

Please Join Us For Pajaro Valley Historical Association's Annual Vintage Picnic

