



*History
Lives Here*

PAJARO VALLEY Historical Association

Spring 2025

Facinating Photos in the PVHA Archives: Two Fires

By Tina Baine

In the early 1900s, fires in cities were more commonplace and could sometimes destroy a building, a block of buildings, or even an entire neighborhood. When fires broke out during the daytime, photographers had a much better chance of capturing impressive images of flames and smoke and people than they did at night when large-format cameras required long exposures and street lighting was a much lower wattage than it is today.

One riveting fire photo from the early days of Watsonville was taken on April 18, 1906—the same day that a 7.9 magnitude earthquake and

subsequent fires destroyed 80% of San Francisco. Pajaro Valley residents were also shaken awake at dawn by the monster quake, which sent brick walls and chimneys toppling and started a fire in the upper-story of the magnificent Moreland Notre Dame Academy on Main Street—reportedly due to “a combustion of chemicals in the [science] laboratory,” according to the Pajaronian.

One of the Watsonville Fire Department’s engines was temporarily delayed by earthquake debris in the firehouse. But firefighters were able to keep the fire contained and extinguish it in less than two hours. The building housed a Catholic school



Fire that destroyed the First Christian Church at Fourth (now East Lake Ave.) and Main streets, July 4, 1902

with both nuns and children in residence, but the Pajaronian reported that no one was injured “owing to the prompt and judicious action of the Sisters and the perfect discipline existing among the pupils under their care.” Designed in 1899 by the famed architect William Weeks, the landmark structure was saved, and its top floor, attic, and belfry were repaired soon after. The building continued to serve as a school, convent, and chapel until it was torn down as part of a campus expansion project in July 1963.

Another dramatic photograph in PVHA’s collection shows the First Christian Church at Fourth (now



Fire on upper story of Moreland Notre Dame Academy on Main Street, 1906

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A look back at Port Watsonville

By Naomi Witmer

Port Watsonville was constructed in 1903 near Palm Beach for the distribution of produce and dairy products to San Francisco. In return, Watsonville received furnished goods from San Francisco.

The steamer ships, *Watsonville* and *E.A. Kilburn*, were used to deliver goods to the Bay area. The installation of an electric railway from Beach Road to the wharf made it easier for goods to be transported to and from the port.

San Jose natives W.J. Rogers and H.H. Main, were the original owners and called it "Port Rogers." They originally wanted to construct the port at the mouth of the Pajaro River but weren't able to come to an agreement



Port Watsonville, 1904. Originally named Port Rogers, the bustling attraction was undone by bankruptcy

with the owners of the land.

The electric railway wasn't only used for the transportation of goods to the port but also as a way for the

citizens of Watsonville to go down to the beach and enjoy the many attractions around the port. A casino, cottages, resort, tents, horse track, and baseball park were constructed all around the bustling port. Rogers and Main commissioned the well-known architect, W.H. Weeks, to build a dance pavilion to the right of the port. Unfortunately, the thriving port would soon meet its end.

Rogers and Main were accused of embezzlement and falsifying records, which led them to stand trial in front of the Santa Cruz Grand Jury. Although they were acquitted, their stockholders withdrew their funding and caused them to declare bankruptcy in 1905. After the company and port were purchased in 1911 by F.E. Snowden, it was renamed Port Watsonville. Between damage from storms, tension between the owners and stockholders, and accusations of white collar crimes being committed by the previous owners, the port was shut down in 1913. 🐼

PVHA

**Preserving the History
of the Greater Pajaro Valley
Established 1940
Incorporated 1956**

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PVHA Vintage Picnic set for June

The PVHA Vintage Picnic will be Saturday, June 28, 2025, at 11:00am, under the oaks. Loretta Estrada will talk about the Estrada family, who arrived in the Watsonville area in 1848. Loretta may also talk about her extensive community service in the Pajaro Valley.

A Farmer's Story

By *Ralph Jacobs*

For 75 continuous years, a Watsonville family has been farming in California's Central Coast area and 30 years in the Imperial Valley. In the late 1940s two brothers, one in high school and the other in grade school, started growing strawberries on a vacant lot next to their Monte Vista Street home. They had 10 rows of berries, selling to their neighbors for 25 cents a basket. In 1950, their father, knowing the boys had an interest in farming, asked them if they would like to plant five acres of strawberries. They accepted the challenge.

This led to the formation of the partnership Carl Dobler and Sons, which included the father Carl and the brothers Carl and Kenneth.

Farming in the early 1950s for the boys was very challenging and a lot of hard work. They did all their own farm work after school, on weekends, and in the summer, with changing weather, up and down markets, and competition from other growers. In spite of all the challenges they managed to survive, sometimes

just barely. The five acres of berries did well for about five years, but during the next two years the berry business failed.

In 1957 they exited the berry business and started growing cabbage. They managed to rent more land and for about seven years the cabbage market was good. At one point they were probably the largest cabbage growers in California. Their cabbage label was King Cabbage.

In about 1964, with the cabbage business facing stiff competition, they started growing green leaf lettuce. Moving on they managed to increase their acreage and production, and were doing okay.

In the mid 1980s the lettuce market collapsed. Many companies, some very big, went out of business. The Doblens were also struggling and barely surviving. Once again they revamped their product mix adding green bell pepper, and later, adding

reds and yellows.

In the early 1990s they started their spring mix (baby lettuces) and baby spinach and head lettuce operations.

In the past 30-plus years they have expanded their local operations with their own packing facilities, gradually increasing acreage under cultivation and adding growing and packing facilities in Holtville, California and Yuma, Arizona.

Today, Carl and Ken are retired. Their children are now in charge and the grandchildren are learning the business. Two great-grandchildren are on their way.

In Ken's own words, "I just wanted to be in agriculture. It's something that's in you and you do it. I enjoyed every minute of it."

PVHA honors Ken, who has been on the Board of Directors since 1998 and has made very significant contributions to the association. 🌱



The Ken Dobler family

PVHA tours the Chief Gene Friend Fire Museum

By Tina Baine

On a cool January morning, former reserve firefighter Ed Banks and his wife Kathleen welcomed three PVHA volunteers warmly for a tour of the beautifully preserved Station No. 1 built in 1924 in downtown Watsonville. After a new fire station was built in 1982, the building was used by various organizations until it was converted into the the Chief Gene Friend Fire Museum in 2001. Gene Friend (Kathleen's father) was a former Assistant Fire Chief and served the department in many capacities for 52 years.

There are currently six retired firetrucks housed on the ground floor of the old station, all of which are operable and sometimes driven in parades. Five of the six were originally purchased and owned by the Watsonville Fire Department, but several saw service in other towns before coming back home.

The crown jewel is the department's first fire engine: a 1915 Seagrave Pumper, with its original gold-leaf decorations and solid rubber tires with wooden spokes. The steering wheel—positioned on the right side of the cab—enabled the big engine to be maneuvered as close as possible to a fire hydrant, back when pumpers carried a lot less firehose than they do now, Ed told us. It was once a Cannery Row restaurant showpiece, but was eventually wrested away from the owner to return to its original home. With a generous donation from the Borina Foundation and others, the engine was overhauled back into working condition.

Other vehicles include a 1928



The fire station (now a museum) was built in 1924. After the great fire of 1927, two new bays were added to the building and a 60-foot steel tower was erected on which firemen could practice.

Seagrave Pumper, a 1928 Seagrave Ladder Truck, a 1941 GMC, a 1959 Seagrave Pumper, and a 1967 Crown Pumper. Like the 1915 pumper, some of the vehicles had to be released by other owners in order to be brought back to the Watsonville Fire Station. In 2003, the 1928 pumper was in storage in Sunnyvale. Gene Friend remembered how they cajoled the

Sunnyvale Fire Brigade—who had fully restored the pumper—to give it to them. “We brought pictures of the station and the 1928 ladder truck,” he said. “We told him about the consecutive serial numbers, and how the
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Fire Museum Tours

The museum is operated by the Watsonville Fire Fighters Association, a non-profit organization. To schedule a tour, go to <https://www.watsonville.gov/465/History-of-the-Department> and complete the Museum Tour Request. A member of the Watsonville Firefighters Association will contact you to set up a date and time.



Museum caretaker Ed Banks dusts off the 1915 Seagrave Pumper, which still has its original gold leaf lettering and solid rubber tires with wooden spokes.

Fire Museum Tour

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ladder truck missed her sister.”

He also remembered when the pumper was purchased in 1928 after a fire spread quickly and burned eight packing sheds only one block away on Walker Street. “Our department’s only pumper—the 1915 engine—happened to be in the shop for repairs. After that day we knew we needed another engine,” he said in 2003.

The 1959 Seagrave Pumper is said to be the first “cab-forward” engine west of the Mississippi River. And the 1967 Crown engine, the first diesel engine owned by the Watsonville Fire Department, also featured power steering and air brakes.

Displays of firefighting equipment in the bay included a bulky, aluminized aviation firefighter’s suit that looked like it could also be used for a walk in space. A “widow-maker” ladder (technically, a Pompier ladder, used to reach areas that ground ladders cannot reach)—a long post with short rungs sprouting out on



The firefighters’ sleeping quarters include uniforms, helmets and hatchets

either side—looked aptly named and was used in training for 50 years, especially when the station had a drill tower. Also hung on the wall was a life net—a white canvas trampoline of sorts used for catching folks jumping out of multi-story buildings, that Ed said, to his knowledge, was never actually used.

In the upstairs hallway, a white fireman’s pole is still in place in a half-round shaft behind a small gate, once used for the firefighters to slide down to the trucks on the first floor.

Also on the second floor is a small library housing scrapbooks, videos, and other records, including the Day Books—a handwritten record of every shift, who was on duty, and the nature of the calls. Two large rooms display a wide array of artifacts, including photographs, hats, helmets, badges, nozzles, and other equipment and memorabilia from the department’s past.

Also on display are the beautiful, bound Sanborn fire insurance maps that firefighters once consulted to locate and quickly assess the construction materials, layout, and potential fire hazards of an involved building during an emergency. The complex coding on these maps included details like the location of fire escapes, water mains, and hydrants, which helped firefighters strategize the most effective way to fight a fire in a specific building or area of the city.

Our tour guide, Ed Banks, served as a reservist—essentially a paid, on-call firefighter—for 25 years in Watsonville, until 2006, when the reserve program ended. Kathleen and Ed are both caretakers of the museum, keeping the trucks dusted and the rest of the building clean and functional. 🐾

On display in the Research Archives

Current displays in the Research Archives, skillfully arranged by our volunteer Lynn Clough:

- A selection of the many vintage Watsonville High School items, including rings, letters, pom-poms, beanies, pins and pennants;
- An assortment of some of the hundreds of vintage local business promotional items we have in our collections.

Have anything you’d like to add to these wonderful collections?





Memorials

Gerry Martin

- Elizabeth Boles
- Pat Johns
- Nancy Ruiz Depuy

Geraldine Hawsey

- Rocky and Judy Franich

Mary Siefke

- Dennis and Laura
Buono-Domsic

Dr. Diane Cooper Gilman

- Philip Gilman MD

Cox Brothers Welding and Equipment

- James and Phyllis Cox

J.P. and Daisy Diane Cox

- James and Phyllis Cox

Cox and Sager Blacksmiths

- James and Phyllis Cox

Ted Hernandez

- Clifford and Linda Leong

Frank Estrada

- Tamia Marg

Mary Ellen

Silva McAndrews

- June Ivelich Pierce

Jennifer Levy

- Jim and Shirley Spain

Antoinette Lukrich

- Ken and Anne Dobler
- Louis and Geneva Ivanovich
- Sue Daugherty Hoff
- Craig Griffin and Family
- Dan and Ann McGrath
- Julie Yamashita
- Colleen Brunetti

Grace Dickson Smith and Clara Dickson

- Anonymous

Marie Loveless

- Dan and Ann McGrath

Judy Doering Nielsen

- Colleen Brunetti

Jim and Jana Herrick

- Jim and Shirley Spain



Donations

General

- Mabel Cole
- William and Cloy Codiga
- P.J. and Carolyn Mecozzi
- Nelle Lyons
- Diane Crawford
- Lester Pedrazzini

Research

- James and Phyllis Cox

Garden Fund

- In Honor
of Marth Muzzi's Birthday*
- Lisa Muzzi



Welcome

New Members

- P.J. and Carolyn Mcozzi



Membership Renewals

November

- Chuck and Ramona Allen
- Bill and Pat Barton
- Margaret Bloom
- William and Cloy Codiga
- Craig and Dana George
- Philip Gilman MD
- Lois Gurnee
- Fred and Gail Haas
- Ted Hernandez
- Grayson Moore
- Deborah Rider
- James Scurich

December

- Doug and Noris Anderson
- Peter and Kristy Bobeda
- Marilyn Hyde
- Jeff and Karen Kane
- John Kane
- Wayne and Suzan Kelly
- Clifford and Linda Leong
- Elizabeth Ludden
- Nelle Lyons
- Art and Mary Jean Wagner

January

- Nancy Ruiz DePuy
- Scott and Jodi Frensley
- Ron Gordon
- Donald and Diane Henrichsen
- Lawrence Lease
- Bill and Karen Moncovich
- Joann Petznick
- June Ivelich Pierce
- Susan Scurich

February

- Daniel and Patricia Davis
- Rosa Guerrero
- Luanne Lauesen and
Emmanuel Brion
- Clifford and Linda Leong
- Donn Marinovich and
Sherrin Grout
- Arlene Okamoto Minami
- Barney and Marlene Radovich
- Karen Theriot Reader
- Patricia Rebele
- Kathleen Reynolds
- Patsy Rodriguez Ronat
- Jeff and Lisa Rosendale
- Mark and Karen Sambrailo
- Susan Scurich
- Tony Scurich Insurance Services
- Alex Solano
- Jim and Shirley Spain

March

- Colleen Brunetti
- Jeanette Crosetti
- Sandra Davidson
- Annamarie Dugger

- John Espinoza
- Bridget Fairhurst
- Nita Gizdich
- John and Karen Jernigan
- Patricia Johns
- Joyce Kalich
- Jan Onufray
- Terry Locke-Paddon
- Adolph S. Rosekrans
- Nathaniel Scurich
- Lynn Sullivan
- Law Offices of Robert E. Wall
- Emil Yappert



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

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.

Scrapbooks and Photo Albums, Oh My!

Did you know that the PVHA collections now include over 300 photo albums and memory scrapbooks? Many of these items cover the first half of the twentieth century, from 1900–1950, and some even date as far back as the 1870s. Our collections include family photo albums, trip records, industry or business records, assorted collections of cards or cigar labels or other oddities, and random clippings on whatever struck someone's fancy.

Although the practice of maintaining scrapbooks containing clippings and photos was common in the 1800s, it wasn't until the advent of the Kodak Brownie camera in 1900 that photo albums grew considerably



in popularity, and became a nearly obsessive practice for many. The Brownie, with its much faster exposure film, allowed anyone to take informal, often unposed—and much more interesting—photographs of any person, event or location.



If you have local photo albums and scrapbooks that we might consider adding to our collections, let us know. Even if you don't have anything to add to our treasures yet, do come by and peruse these wonderful memories! ❧



Fires from page 1

East Lake Avenue) and Main streets consumed by fire and smoke on July 4, 1902. With brisk breezes blowing, the pine building was leveled while Chief Henry Rogge and most of the fire brigade were out of town competing in a hose race tournament. A Pajaronian reporter held them blameless, however, surmising that, “Had the whole department been present the edifice would have been consumed by fire.”

Bystanders were able to rescue several valuable items, including a piano, a small reed organ, books, chairs, and a parlor carpet, but

not the splendid pipe organ. The cause of the attic fire was not determined, but some suspected “the careless ... handling of fire-crackers.” The church and the pipe organ were insured and the adjuster handed a check over to the trustees only five days after the fire. By that time the parishioners were planning to build a new church, this time composed of stone and brick.

Sadly, this was not the first or the last time the congregation would lose their church to fire. They lost an identical building “suddenly and mysteriously” on the same piece of

property in 1892 when the structure was nearing completion but was not yet in use. And, after the 1902 fire, the next church, made from cut stone, was also gutted by fire on March 29, 1927. Built a little further up East Lake Avenue at Alexander Street, it was widely believed that the cause of the fire was arson, since an unidentified man was spotted running from the building. Undaunted, the congregation built a new church in 1928 which still stands unharmed at the corner of Madison Street and East Lake Avenue. ❧



SANTA CRUZ COUNTY HISTORY FAIR

— FREE ADMISSION —

Hosted by PVHA and
the Watsonville Library



PAJARO VALLEY
Historical Association



Saturday, May 17, 2025 • 12-4pm
Watsonville Buddhist Temple Gym
423 Bridge Street, Watsonville, CA

- Celebrate Santa Cruz County's diverse history
- Connect with 30+ local history organizations throughout the county
- Discover stories of neighborhoods and residents
- Artifacts, publications and more
- Brief focused presentations at 1, 2 and 3pm

Visit: santacruzhistoryfair.wordpress.com