

Parades out of the past

By BETTY LEWIS

"Grand Marshal for the parade was C. B. Lewis and the prize winning float was decorated by the Native Sons and Daughters. Miss Lois Leslie was Goddess of Liberty riding in a float 'very tastily decorated' by members of the Woman's Club. In the afternoon the Watsonville Canton, I.O.O.F., gave an exhibition drill on Main Street, before a large crowd, for half an hour doing just credit to their organization. After this there was a fire fighting demonstration on the city lot, corner of Rodriguez and Second. A shed had been built of rough lumber and the interior filled with boards and boxes and then soaked with oil. This was fired and the alarm turned in and in just 2½ minutes a stream of water was on the fire."

July 5, 1916, Evening Pajaronian

Like many other towns throughout the United States, Watsonville has had its share of Independence Day activities with its parades, picnics, literary exercises, Old Timer's luncheons, horse shows, horse racing, talent shows, baseball games, carnivals, car races, speeches, band concerts, hose team contests, dances, fireworks, barbecues, water carnivals and visiting dignitaries. With banners waving, flags flying and colorful bunting adorning houses and businesses, patriotic fervor has risen to a high pitch.

Watsonville has not had a parade or celebration every year, but when it did, it always seemed to be the "biggest and best" with headlines in the paper such as "monster crowds" "gigantic throngs" and "immense turnout." When automobiles came chugging and jerking onto the scene, auto parades were a must; during the war years, the military parade was "the thing" and, after the wars, the veterans were featured. Each year the floats got bigger and better until the cost factor became a major consideration. The Goddess of Liberty contest became an institution — the girl who sold the most buttons or garnered the most votes was proclaimed "Queen" and wore her Goddess crown with great dignity — except when the unexpected happened as it did to one Goddess when the horses pulling the decorated wagon dashed off down the street, leaving the Goddess behind!

The "Horribles Parade" straggled down Main Street, each year trying to be more "horrible" than the year before. The more bands in the parade the better it was. The Watsonville Band, school bands, Chinese band, orphanage band all added to the patriotic feeling as the familiar marching music filled the air. The parade marshals, dignitaries, clowns, baton twirlers, marching units all contributed to the grand and glorious 4th. Let's take a walk back through the years and see how the Pajaro Valley celebrated . . . picking a few years at random.

1896

Watsonville won first prize in the hook and ladder races; the local "fire laddies" out-running Gilroy and San Juan and reaching the top rung of the ladder with great speed. "The price of ballots for the Goddess of Liberty contest is 2½ cents. The voting commenced today. Get in and hustle for your favorite." April 2, 1896, The Pajaronian. The favorite that year turned out to be Louise Reiter.

1904

No parade this year but "red, white and

blue electric lights lit up the main street and the walkways of the plaza as the band played patriotic music for the people strolling by." At the literary exercises in the plaza, orator of the day, P. G. Sheehy, delivered a stirring speech:

" . . . Setting aside a day to Freedom and Liberty at this time of year seems in keeping with our surroundings, the earth is garlanded in the brightest raiment, everything about us seems at the height of beauty touched by nature's magic wand; our senses brightened by the summer sun, animal life quickened by nature's change, our pleasurable passions alert, brightened and sweetened by the songs of the birds, the fragrance and brilliant hues of the flowers. All nature seems bursting forth from her cold wintry, bondage, all unrestrained."

After the exercises, horse races were held on Main Street between Fifth and First.

1908

Firecrackers being unlawful in the city, the following appeared in the Pajaronian: " . . . Some young ladies were going along the street shooting an occasional firecracker and they were having such a lot of innocent fun over it that no policeman with a heart as big as a mosquito would have had the heart to interfere, even in behalf of one of the city's faded bouquet of ordinances." The mayor arrived on the scene and ordered the young ladies to be arrested, but, as the Pajaronian was to note: "Very properly the police officer refused to act. He allowed those young ladies to escape the odium of an uncalled for arrest, an arrest which, if it had been made, would have reflected shame on no one but the man ordering it." This year of 1908 was the second year of Lake Watsonville's existence — made by damming up the Pajaro River near the bridge over into Monterey County. The people flocked to the lake to enjoy the water carnival, band music, swimming races and picnics along the banks of the river.

1916

Just prior to America's entry into World War I local citizens thronged downtown to view the highly touted 4th of July automobile parade. Nearly 100 illuminated autos were in the night parade with the passengers carrying lighted sparklers. Afterward the crowd adjourned to the plaza for a carnival followed by the Fireman's Ball held at the Odd Fellow's Hall. A glorious 4th under the chairmanship of Frank Rodgers.

1933

Harold Kane was general chairman of this 4th and George Radcliff, former publisher of the Pajaronian, was speaker in the plaza. Making a hit in the parade was Jimmy Arnerich dressed as Uncle Sam and riding a bicycle. Goddess of Liberty was Miss Bertha Bushnell who stood on a platform draped in yellow satin; she was swathed in white satin and carried the traditional torch of liberty. The Japanese float was "a thing of beauty" carrying an artificial cherry tree in blossom with beautiful Japanese girls in brightly colored kimonos standing underneath.

1940

The first California chief executive to ride in a Watsonville parade was Gov. Culbert Olson on a "noble" black horse. When the governor stopped in front of the reviewing stand he remarked: "If the horse will stand still then I'll be only too glad to comment on

this glorious day. This is the most important celebration in the nation's history and it is in true spirit of America's citizenship and we should be thankful we enjoy it ourselves." General Chairman was Frank Orlando who rode with Assemblyman Jack Leonard and Senator Jim Holohan. Also riding in the parade were the three remaining Civil War Veterans in the county, George Colbey, Capt. Bryant and Capt. Smith. The Chinese Association was awarded first prize for best patriotic or artistic float. Hometown boy Marsh Maslin, then columnist for the Call Bulletin, came to town for the 1940 festivities and reminisced about 1910 when he was just a boy:

"I had a job delivering morning papers on my bike and early on that morning in 1910 I rose at 5 o'clock, collected my papers and started out with my Chinese bombs safely hidden in my paper bag. They were about as large as a dollar-and-a-quarter baseball, all wrapped round with bamboo . . . And every few blocks I'd get off my bicycle, look carefully around to see that no early rising householder was looking from his window, light the fuse of the bomb, get on my machine again and pedal like the dickens away from there. The noise was tremendous and immediately the front windows of every house went up and there would be pa and ma and the kids with their heads out — wondering what rascally kid was making that noise!" —Evening Pajaronian.

1941

"With the blare of bugles, rattle of drums and dozens of colorful floats, cars and marching units, Watsonville hit the climax of its annual Fourth of July celebration Friday morning with an hour-and-a-half parade equalling or surpassing anything

seen here. Twenty-five thousand spectators packed the main street grandstands and lined the curbs from start to finish watching the Pajaro Valley's largest civic event of the year." —Register-Pajaronian.

Grand Marshal was P. J. Storm who led the parade with aids Nelse Struve and Ed Ferguson followed by the band from Camp McQuaide. Fifteen American flags were held high in the massed colors division followed by other marching units, more bands, Joe Vyeda's six-horse team, decorated cars, floats and on and on. In the afternoon, people "stowed away" mountains of beans and beef, stopping at 1 p.m. to listen to President Roosevelt's Independence Day message on the radio. That evening, there was a firework display

at the High School athletic field followed by a baseball game, then a dance at the Veteran's Memorial Hall. On the next day, Saturday, there was a national defense parade in the evening with more than 800 soldiers from Ft. Ord and Camp McQuaide participating. This was followed by a "fresh air" dance held at Third (Beach) and Alexander Streets. On Sunday an air show was held which featured stunt flyer Squire Hawkins, with parachute jumps, formation and precision flying and a bomb dropping demonstration.

1943

The theme was "Buy War Stamps to Build the Shangri-La to Bomb Tokyo." Many of the local stores set up booths promoting the sale of war stamps, the one in the plaza

REFERENCE

WATSONVILLE
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WATSONVILLE, CALIFORNIA 95033



Fourth of July parade of 1909 was festive occasion; note children next to plaza (right)

being headed by Claire Daley. The military parade consisted of some 1,000 men and, also, mobile field equipment. From the Register Pajaronian: "Military censorship forbids publication of the exact number of men, their units or description of equipment in such processions." On Saturday and Sunday evenings there were roller skating contests held in the Civic Auditorium on Second Street and the winners were given War Bonds as prizes.

1946

The second annual horse show drew more than 5,000 people to the fairgrounds. The Horribles Parade was held on July 3rd with Louis Bechis crowned as "Whisker King." Death of the OPA was re-enacted by a coffin marked "OPA" with a large man labeled "President" and a small man labeled "Congress." The ever-present "Chic Sales Special" was the entry of the 20-30 Club with Pat Carroll occupying a conspicuous position; it won the most horrible entry! Grand Prize for the 4th parade was a float commemorating Philippine Independence. At the annual barbecue, with Ed Peterson and Howard Ditlevsen the head chefs, 3,800 people consumed a ton of meat, a half ton potato salad, 1,500 pounds of beans, 420 loaves of bread and 200 gallons of coffee!

1948

This year there were three parades including a comic parade, a western dress ball, vaudeville show, fireworks, Sciots horse show at the fairgrounds, barbecue and auto racing at the Palm Beach Speedway where a new quarter mile track had just been built inside a previous half mile oval.

1952

Watsonville celebrated its Centennial in a grand and glorious fashion with many activities and the Register-Pajaronian published a centennial edition of the paper which was followed by a booklet on the history of the Pajaro Valley. The Pajaro Valley Historical Assn. entered a float in the parade which represented the Portola Expedition with Harold Kane riding in armor as Portola followed by a group of young monks and Indians. It has long been the custom of the P.V.H.A. to host an Old Timer's Luncheon where former residents gather together to relive old times and hear speakers tell about their family's history.

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Parades

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1962

A new 50 star flag was raised in the city plaza and, throughout the town, homes and businesses were decorated with the bright new flags — theme of this 4th of July was "Man in space, rockets and missiles — the world of the future." 3,000 people jammed the grandstands in front of the plaza while many more lined the curbs along Main St. for the parade in which Pamela Jean Gamble, the new Miss California, made her first official appearance under her new title. Reigning as Queen was Mildred Jan Gowin who represented the local strawberry industry.

1968

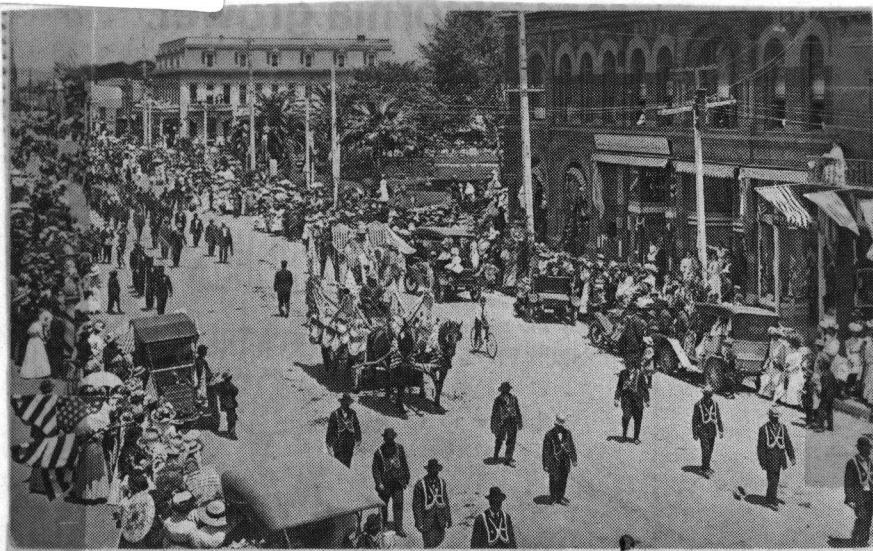
"Celebration Comes Back With a Bang."

The first parade in four years was under the guiding hand of the Watsonville Jaycees. The Oakland Oaks' Rick Barry was the Grand Marshal and people streamed towards Main St. carrying camp stools, garden chairs and even stepladders to see the parade.

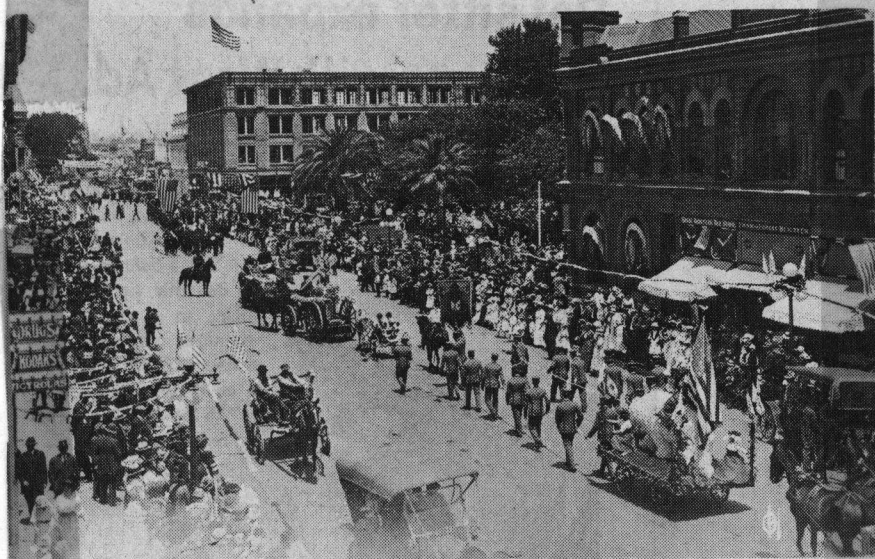
In 1977, we will celebrate not only Independence Day but, also, Watsonville's 125th Anniversary. We have grown from a small village called Pajaro to what we are today. Our parades have grown and changed, even the direction! But, even without the Chinese bombs and firecrackers, we still retain many of our customs and ideals.

"Another Unfortunate — On the morning of the Fourth, word was brought into town that a man was hanging by his neck to a tree on the Picnic Grounds (Craig's) half a mile from town. A number, impelled by a morbid curiosity to behold something horrible, went out there. Their faces blanched as they caught sight of the poor fellow turning round and round in the breeze, and the very birds seemed to sing with a mournful cadence among the trees, 'Was he dead?' they asked, 'Or did tenacious life still remain with him.' A knife was procured, the rope cut, and down went the semblance of mortality, the coat and vest bursting open as he fell when it was found that the clothes contained naught but straw. Some practical joker had taken this method to sell somebody, and succeeded."

—The Pajaronian, July 7, 1876



In 1903, Mansion House stood at corner opposite Plaza . . .

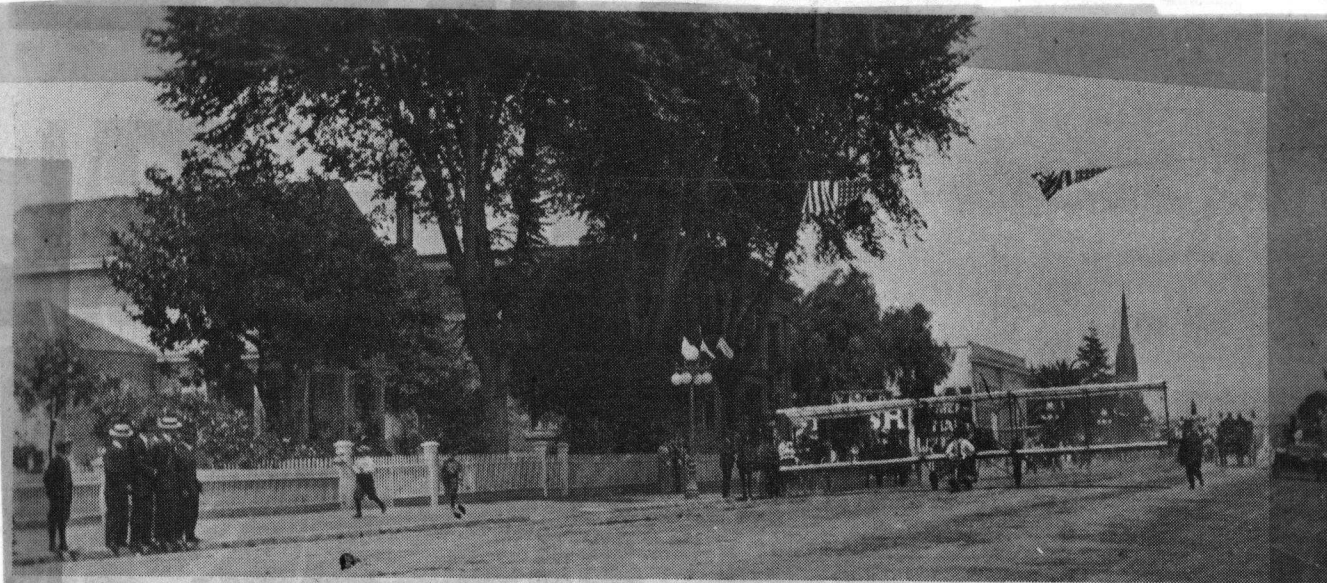


. . . But by 1914 had been moved north to make way for Lettunich Building, shown under construction in this rare picture



Soroptimist float was just one of many in July 4th parade of 1937

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William Russell, a local mechanic, entered his plane in parade in 1916 or thereabouts; 500 block of Main St. is shown; St. Patrick's church can be seen in distance



Native Sons and Daughters await start of parade in 1909