



Damage to Watsonville homes is evaluated after the Loma Prieta Earthquake, which struck the area on Oct. 17, 1989.

Register-Pajaronian file

Deadly Loma Prieta quake struck Watsonville 19 years ago today

Earthquake killed 63 people, including six in Santa Cruz County

REGISTER-PAJARONIAN STAFF REPORT

Nineteen years ago today, a 7.1-magnitude earthquake rumbled through Northern California, killing scores, injuring thousands, tearing apart roads and buildings, and leaving behind a repair order that took years to complete.

The 5:04 p.m. Loma Prieta quake — its epicenter in the Forest of Nisene Marks in Santa Cruz County — killed 63 people, including six in this county. Close to 4,000 people were injured. Storefronts fell flat to the ground, freeway bridges dropped, roads crumpled and home shifted off their foundations. Fires broke out. Electric-

ity went away for four days, and so did running water.

Emergency workers were pushed to the limit day and night for days on end. Watsonville Municipal Airport became an emergency landing zone for planes and helicopters loaded with supplies and rescue crews.

Adding to torn and frayed nerves was a wealth of aftershocks that sent residents charging out of buildings time and again over the next several days. Many people chose just not to go back indoors, even resorting to sleeping outside.

Businesses shut down, roads were closed, traffic lights

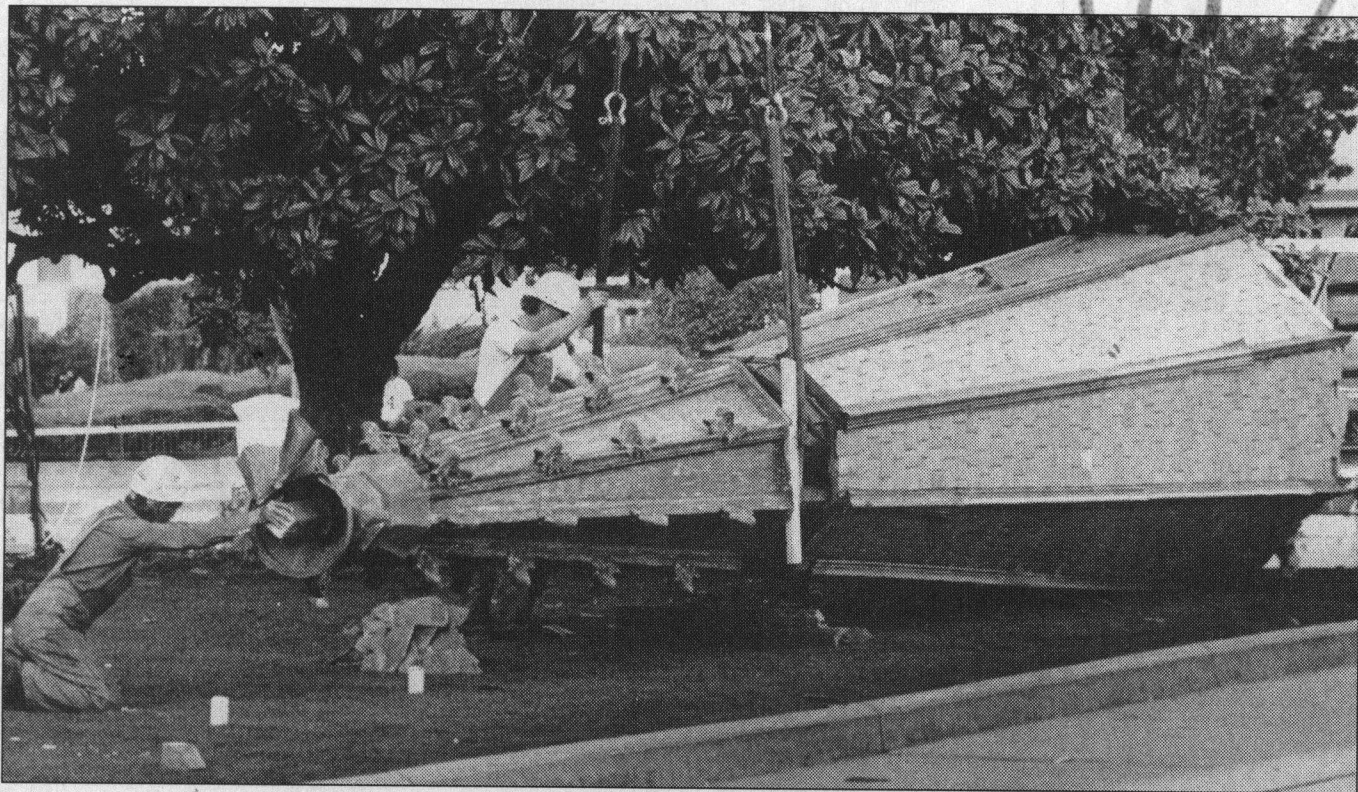
and gas pumps didn't work. Many business owners handed out free goods, including cases of soft drinks, toilet paper and baby goods. Market shelves were emptied across store aisles. Ice cream melted and

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Felix Ybarra
831-840-6113

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QUAKE

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meat and fish went bad.

Rows of homes around Watsonville sagged off their foundations, especially along Lincoln and Marchant streets. The Odd Fellows building (now Plaza Vigil) came apart, killing one person. Ford's department store (now Gottschalks) was cracked and eventually torn down. The Masonic Building, now a parking lot at Maple and Union streets, had to be torn down.

"I recall how a section of Main Street was just filled with rubble near the plaza," said Jane Borg of the Pajaro Valley Historical Association. "We lost several historical buildings."

St. Patrick's Church also sustained major structural damage and was eventually dissembled down to a mere few doorways, and then rebuilt.

"St. Patrick's was an amazing rebuild," Borg said. "They managed to use much of the same material that was torn down. It was an expensive job. It took a bit of time."

The main building that housed Watsonville High School eventually had to be demolished following an aftershock in the spring of 1990.

The National Guard pitched massive tent cities in Ramsay and Callaghan parks. Hundreds of people lived there in the interim, as repairs got under way. An emergency center was set up at the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds.

The quake struck during Game 1 of the World Series, in which the San Francisco Giants were hosting the Oakland A's. A



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TOP: Construction workers dissemble the main steeple of Saint Patrick's Church in Watsonville during a full rebuilding of the church after the building sustained major damage in the Loma Prieta quake. **ABOVE:** Several days after the earthquake, a young girl observes left over damage while strolling along Marchant Street near Elm Street in downtown Watsonville.

huge section of the upper lanes of the Bay Bridge caved in and a sweeping section of Highway 880 in Oakland — the Cypress Freeway — pancaked, smashing scores of vehicles.

In Watsonville, the stretch of Highway 1 between Riverside and Main Street that spans Struve Slough caved in. Traffic was eventually rerouted through Harkins Slough and Lee roads for close to a year as night and day repairs got under way on the highway.

Pacific Avenue, the main street of

downtown Santa Cruz, sustained so much damage that the street and sidewalks were eventually torn up and entirely replaced. Huge tents were set up to allow businesses to operate. Downtown was reduced to a sprawling construction zone for years with narrow plywood ramps and chain-link corridors for pedestrians.

Property damage was estimated to be \$5.9 billion for the entire quake, the most costly natural disaster, at that time, in the United States, according to the Berkeley Seismological Laboratory.