

# The story of Dr. P. K. Watters and Watsonville's first hospital

"In the rush of so-called modern methods of living, the tradition of the Old Time Family Doctor has been very largely lost sight of. The Doctor of your grandfather's day was always looked to as one of the foremost men of the community. He was next to the minister or priest in the minds and hearts of his people." E. J. Treffinger, 1925

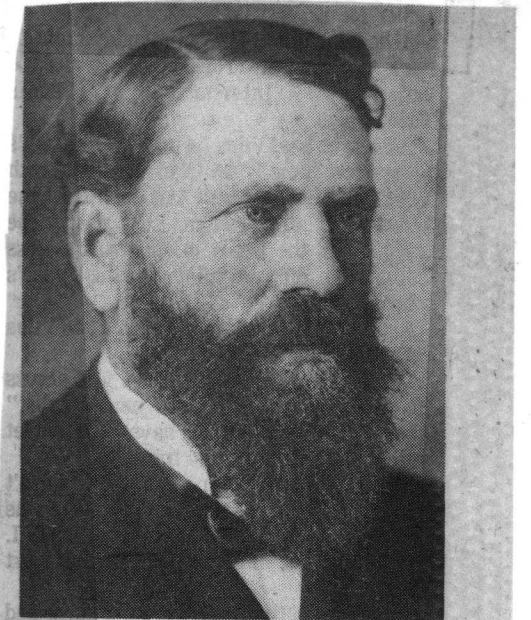
By BETTY LEWIS

This is the story of Dr. Peter Kemp Watters and the first Watsonville Hospital, which he founded. Residents of the Pajaro Valley are well aware of the fairly new Watsonville Hospital on Green Valley Road and many remember the "old" hospital located at Prospect and Monte Vista. But how many remember the first one on East Third (Beach) St.? But let us go back a little further than that — to 1894 when Mrs. J. A. Linscott purchased a small house on East Third next to the Opera House, the former Alexander home where Sol Alexander had been born. Dr. Watters rented this house from Mrs. Linscott and started the Watsonville Sanitarium with Mrs. Linscott as the matron in charge. At this time P. K. Watters had his medical office in the Peck Building next to the plaza.

In 1895 Dr. Watters purchased a house and lot on East Third and Carr Sts. from Dr. Chapman. He made a number of improvements to the home and moved his family into it, having formerly lived on Rodriguez St. In 1897 Ole Christensen was awarded the contract to build a five-room building next to the Watters home on the E. Beach side to be used as a private sanatorium, at a cost of \$1,079. In April of 1899 Dr. Watters moved his office from the Peck Building into the new sanitarium and in June of the same year, Architect William H. Weeks prepared plans for a new home to replace the old one. Weissenberger and Hiatt were awarded the contract to erect this house which cost \$4,000 and contained thirteen rooms.



Looking west on East Third (Beach) St., the Watters home is at far right, the hospital (with flagpole) next to it, the old Presbyterian Church at left.



DR. P. K. WATTERS

*Register-Pajaronian*

Tuesday, September 30, 1975

REFERENCE

**WATSONVILLE**

HISTORY

WATSONVILLE



In 1902 the sanitarium was incorporated under the laws of California with the name "Watsonville Hospital & Training School for Nurses." On the board of directors were Dr. Watters, President; Mrs. Louise Watters (his wife), vice-president; Miss Sara Paulsen, secretary and superintendent; and O. S. Tuttle and H. C. Wyckoff. The hospital had been enlarged in 1901 by Dr. Watters. Not wanting to borrow money for the project he had sold property at the southeast corner of Main & East Lake (Rasco's) to architect Weeks for \$6,000 and used these funds for the new additions.

Regular lectures were given to the nurses in training throughout the year by the following physicians: Guy Miller, M. D., Medical & Surgical Pediatrics; S. C. Rodgers, M. D., obstetrical nursing; F. H. Koepke, M. D., anesthetics, therapeutics and clinical pathology; E. E. Porter, M. D., medical nursing, hygiene and bandaging; E. E. Briggs, M.D., orthopedics, acute infectious exanthemata; S. T. Pope, M. D., surgical and gynecological nursing; H.B. Rodgers, D.D.S., care and attention of the teeth and oral cavity in sickness and health; and P. K. Watters, M. D., anatomy and physiology. The training School for Nurses was conducted from 1902 to 1915; the students lived in a house behind the Watters home on Carr Street.

In 1909 a brochure was published showing pictures of the exterior and interior of the hospital and containing information on the facilities and staff. "It (the hospital) was built and furnished with money made through the legitimate practice of medicine and surgery. Its object being to better the condition of the sick and injured and to promote the advancement of modern medicine and surgery. With this object in view, the building has been furnished throughout with all the modern conveniences necessary for its successful accomplishments. This hospital has never received financial aid from anybody, nor do we expect any. We do not believe in cultivating a necessity for charity, yet, during the past fourteen years since the hospital was started, we have done several thousand dollars worth of charity work. There has never been one refused admission when there was room for their accommodation."

Dr. Watters was one of the community's pioneer doctors and held the position of physician, counselor, friend and civic leader. His reputation as a doctor ranked



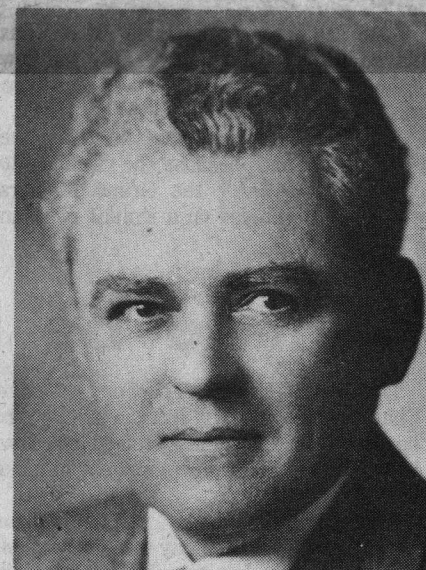
**Dr. P. K. Watters and nurses**

high and he was considered one of the most successful practitioners in this part of the state. Tall, dignified and with a personality that invited confidence, he was a man of commanding presence who, in his prime, was not easily forgotten. A native of West Liberty, Iowa, born in 1854, he moved to Ohio with his family, his mother having died. He later returned to Iowa where he graduated from the medical department of the Iowa State University, in 1879. On Jan. 3, 1883, he married Louise Eggers and went on to practice medicine in Nebraska and Iowa and, eventually, Eugene, Ore. In 1893, with his wife and three children, he came to Watsonville and set up a practice. He served as mayor from 1909-1911. He was a trustee in the Elks' Lodge, was affiliated with the Masonic Lodge and served on the high school board. He was also a charter member of the Galoot Club—a group of local men who met informally in the old Cooper Store at Main and West Beach.

Children of Peter and Louise Watters were Henry, Lottie, Freda (Warner) and Louise (Hudson). Peter graduated from Watsonville High School in 1903, went on to medical school and after World War I returned to Watsonville to take over the management of the hospital. The six years

previous to this, 1913-1919, Miss Bessie Silliman had leased and operated the hospital. Lottie Watters, a graduate nurse, was the supervisor in 1919 and Miss Nixon, an experienced army nurse, was appointed general manager. The hospital was painted and a small court was constructed in the center of the building. A feature of the hospital was "a complete maternity ward entirely separated from the rooms occupied by other patients. Here the future residents of Watsonville can be ushered into the world under the most advantageous circumstances with them and the mothers assured of the best possible care." And further: "The operating room is furnished with every up-to-date convenience known to the medical profession. This part of the hospital is certainly in demand, as it is being used every day for one or two operations."

In 1923 another remodeling took place and there were now 13 rooms, a ward room, six obstetrics rooms, a nursery and delivery room. In 1936 there was an average of 15 patients in the hospital and the rates were \$6 a day. "Charges are payable at once. Weekly statements are rendered. Patients who do not pay in advance are rendered a bill at once." In 1938 the new hospital was built at a cost of \$10,000 on Prospect with



**DR. HENRY WATTERS**

A.W. Story as the architect. The "old" hospital on East Third was remodeled into offices and apartments.

Dr. P.K. Watters died of a heart attack in June of 1930. It had been just before this that Henry Watters was presented with the first copy of the Manzanita, the high school annual. The copy was personally autographed by every member of the graduating class and a page in the book was dedicated to Dr. Watters, thanking him for the loyal support he had always given high school affairs including the securing of the high school athletic field. Henry Watters died in 1964, his sister, Lottie, having died in 1960. Thus ended a family medical team that had made a tremendous contribution to the Watsonville community.