

Agriculture

PAJARO VALLEY AGRICULTURE

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# When the apple was king

By JOE MYERS

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**WATSONVILLE** — After World War II, during the period of 1947-1954, I was employed as an agriculture inspector for Santa Cruz County.

One had to pass a written and oral examination, conducted by certain members of the State Department of Agriculture to qualify for this position.

I attained the qualifications of county agriculture commissioner, by way of extended examinations. Part of my duties were to enforce provisions of the state agriculture code, which are standards for marketing and consumption of fruits, nuts and vegetables grown in California.

Grown at the time in the Pajaro Valley were a variety of fruits and vegetables that included apples, lettuce, tomatoes, string beans and bushberries, which included logans, ollalies and black berries. Then there were small strawberry plantings of two to five acres, usually grown by Japanese

families. Co-ops were then organized and named "Naturipe" and "Watsonville Berry Co-op."

Next came the apple business. Grown in Pajaro Valley at the time were principal varieties, namely Newtown Pippins and three delicious varieties. Other lesser varieties included Belleflowers, McIntosh, Black Twigs, Alexanders, and many others.

There were many apple sheds in the area to handle the large crop. Listed here are some from the very long list of shed names and owners that dominated the area: Pete Stolic, Beach Road; Watsonville Exchange operated by Mike, Mich and Louie Resetar, Beach Road; Bob Scurich, Freedom Boulevard. John Buliach, Walker Street; H.A. Rider, Freedom Boulevard; N.P. Scurich, Walker Street; Mt. Madonna Apple Co-op, Kearney Extension, and Walter Vaas, Pleasant Valley Road.

There were a few sheds in and around the valley with cold storages that were of minor consequence. Cold storages

listed in this area were P.V. Cold Storage, on Second Street and Beach Road, and Farmers Cold Storage; Kearney Extension. There were also cold storages associated with some of the larger apple sheds.

Since apples were a commodity listed in the agriculture code, sheds were randomly inspected for compliance. After inspection, the fruit was either free to ship or rejected by affixing a "red tag" if the fruit was defective beyond tolerances. Defects found on apples at the time were russetting, sunburn, insect injury, bird pecks, internal breakdown, apple scab, bitter-pit and dirt.

Lettuce was a big crop in the Watsonville area with sheds strung out on Beach Road, where most of the plantings were located. Going out first on Beach Road was Watsonville Exchange (Resetar Brothers), followed by Tony Tomasello, Jere Smith, Walt Massera and Bud Angle Co., the latter on Walker Street. Also grown were artichokes, brussels sprouts,



File photo by Kathleen Moe

**Pete Stolic, left, poses with his children Pete Jr. and Katherine in this undated file photo.**

broccoli, cabbage, etc., shipped mostly by trucks to local markets and to San Francisco and L.A.

The Del Monte Café, a hang-out on the "waterfront," as the industrial area was called, served the best steaks in Watsonville. Many cryptic deals

were arranged by way of a handshake at this popular establishment by those in the lettuce business.

Since raspberry and strawberry acreage have increased, the apple industry for the most part has fallen by the wayside. A good example is Holohoan

Road, where apple orchards once abounded, now replaced with teeming raspberry and strawberry plantings.

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*Joe Myers is World War II veteran and a longtime resident of Watsonville.*