

The flooding of Watsonville through the years

Floods
Over the years Watsonville has had its share of floods and one that many old timers remember hearing about was in 1911. The following is from the Watsonville Register in March of that year: "Bridges Up River Go Out — Narrow Gauge Submerged — Water Works Lose Pipe — Owing to a rush of water down Browns' Valley and Corralitos Creeks, 90 feet of the flume in Corralitos and 40 feet of water pipe in Brown's valley were washed out. People are enjoined from a lavish use of water until repairs are made."

On that March 7th morning, Watsonville received a drenching that shattered all traditions in the history of the city up to that point. The Salsipuedes Creek broke its banks and water rushed into town and the land was covered from the Pajaro River to the corner of Main and East Third streets.

Central Avenue was renamed "Central Rapids" and boats were plying passengers up and down



That was
Watsonville

Betty Lewis

Main Street. Wading boots and rubber boots were sold out by noon with an estimated \$2,500 to \$3,000 changing hands during the rush. Western Union was out of commission and the telephone company had only one line open and that was to Salinas.

Mayor P.K. Watters had a narrow escape while making a professional call on First Street. He had two men row him down to a house but an oar was lost; the current upset the craft and carried the doctor and his companions toward a telegraph pole, which they climbed up and waited half an



Courtesy of Betty Lewis

A photograph of past flooding in Watsonville.

hour to be rescued — the water at that point was over their shoulders!

On Bridge Street, now Riverside, six horses belonging to Frank Silva were trapped in a barn and two daring men took axes and broke down the barn doors; the horses were cut loose and swam to safety then they bolted down Main Street but were soon caught. The stores were all barricaded by bulkheads thrown up with a few boards and sand. The following was noted in the local newspaper: "The loud ringing of the fire bell caused the people to become even more excited as their nerves were already in high tension — but it

turned out to be a chimney fire that was extinguished long before the fire department ever thought of going."

The water was up to the floor of the Pajaro Valley National Bank (now the site of Wells Fargo). The pit of the Lyric Theater was full and the water was a foot above the entrance. In the post office (then in the Porter building) the lower boxes were just above the level. A stream flowed through the engine house (located on Main Street); the stores in that section were filled with muddy water and articles from shelves floated on the water's surface.

"Special Notice — To the Peo-

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 ple of the City of Watsonville - Owing to the Water Co.'s flumes being washed away and requiring from two to three days to repair same, you are strictly prohibited from using any water for washing buggies, watering horses, washing sidewalks, or baths, or anything else until further notice; other than cooking and drinking purposes. Anyone caught taking advantage of this, with our shortage of water, will be immediately arrested. Policemen have orders to patrol the streets and arrest anybody violating same. Wash your sidewalks and places of business with the water, as it recedes in the streets. P.K. Watters, Mayor of the City of Watsonville." — **Evening Pajaronian, March 9, 1911.**

The flood of 1955 was one a lot of us certainly remember and, even more recently, the flooding of Pajaro that caused so much damage. But as the late Frank Orr, former editor of the Register Pajaronian once said: "The measure of a community, like the measure of a man, is often the quality of its response to an emergency..."

And Watsonville has certainly been able to do that through the many floods, earthquakes and other disasters that have hit our community through the years.

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Courtesy of Betty Lewis

People waded through past flooding in Watsonville.