

Earthquakes rocked Watsonville's history

✓ Earthquake - Watsonville RP 12-27-07

Watsonville has experienced many, many earthquakes. But the worst was in October of 1989; and the April 18, 1906, quake did some limited damage.

While attending a postcard and paper memorabilia show in Santa Cruz recently, I found some wonderful postcards of Watsonville. One of those is from 1907. On the face of the card is a picture of the Watsonville strawberry fields, and what was on the back piqued my interest. I found the following, as mentioned on the card, on micro-film at the Watsonville library:

"Five separate earthquake shocks were felt at Camp Goodall shortly after midnight Sunday night. Three were slight tremors, two, the last, strong shakes. Succeeding them, those whose ears were as close to the ground as people sleeping in the camp cottages, heard a rumble and roar such as is made by a fast train rushing through a tunnel, an avalanche of rocks tumbling down a mountain or it might be by a Titanic game of nine pins played in some cavern far underground. At the same time the ocean surged and roared on the beach with sudden fury that startled some of those living nearby, who



That Was Watsonville

Betty Lewis

feared that a tidal wave might overtop (sic) the rampart of sand and engulf the adjoining country. This alarm, though natural, was needless, for the disturbance of the waters soon subsided and the Pacific Ocean resumed the regular rhythm of its ebb and flow." — Evening Pajaronian, Dec. 3, 1907

Camp Goodall, at that time, was a United States reservation and was leased to the Pacific Steamship Company who, in turn, subleased it to Jerome Downing, manager of Camp Goodall (later Port Watsonville and Pajaro Dunes).

During the 1906 earthquake, the A. Lewis two-story building at the corner of Main and Maple withstood the quake without any damage but, in 1989, fell to the wrecking ball from extensive damage. 1906 saw Mr. DuCommon's jewelry store sustaining some damage, but at his home a more serious loss



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A young girl observes leftover damage from the Oct. 17, 1989, Loma Prieta earthquake while strolling along Marchant Street near Elm Street in downtown Watsonville.

occurred. A Chinese tea set dating back to the period of the Ming dynasty was smashed into bits and pieces — an irreplaceable historical loss.

Back in May of 1899 the following appeared in the Pajaronian: "There was no earthquake shock here last Saturday. It was a salute to Admiral Dewey on

his departure from Manila, which was being fired at the Granite Rock Company's quarry at Logan by W.E. Miller, Jr. The scene of the explosion is about eight miles from Watsonville, and though less than five pounds of Hercules powder was fired, the loud report was distinctly heard in this city and even out in Corralitos."

By August of that year, 1899, though, 36 shocks were recorded on an indicator owned by H. Atkinson of Watsonville. It affected the Green Valley and Casserly districts the most and was followed by many other shocks. The

Pajaronian noted: "Pajaroites are ready for a peaceful change."

On Oct. 18, 1899 San Francisco Chronicle the following appeared: "A terrifying earthquake ripped through Northern California late yesterday afternoon, killing more than 200 people, injuring hundred more, setting buildings ablaze and destroying sections of the Bay Bridge." The damage in Watsonville was quite extensive. And one person was killed. The picture shows the Ford Department store being torn down, as were many other structures in Watsonville. A very sad time all around as many homes were affected in one way or another.

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ABOVE: Construction workers disassemble the main steeple of Saint Patrick's Church in Watsonville during a full rebuilding of the church following the Loma Prieta earthquake. RIGHT: Damage of Watsonville homes is evaluated after the quake.

