

County Fair has always been a small town affair

Forerunner to the present Santa Cruz County Fair, as far as Watsonville was concerned, was the Pajaro Valley Fair first held in 1887. A committee was formed and merchants were contacted in order to raise funds for the fair which would allow local products to be exhibited and viewed by the general public — thus showing how lavish nature had been to the Pajaro Valley.

The Opera House (also called the Rink), which

That was Watsonville

stood at 23 East Beach St., was rented for the event and preparations stepped into high gear as the Oct. 21 opening drew near. Jams and jellies were being made; booths gaily decorated; exhibits placed in the large hall — the local community was a beehive of activity. As the opening hour approached people were lined up at the doors as they swung open for that first fair and the visitors were filled with excitement and anticipation as they entered the hall.

A lively tune was being played by the Watsonville band and the long awaited festivities were under way. On display were fruits, vegetables, baked goods and school exhibits. The baby show was a special feature with over 80 of the small fry being entered into the contest which had to move out of the Opera House and over to the plaza as the attendance was so large.

That first fair was a resounding success and everyone could hardly wait for the next year's event to roll around.

In 1890, the following appeared in the book "The History of Santa Cruz County" regarding the fair: "The people of the valley have a common interest, and the free exchange of ideas and opinions relative to the common good has no doubt been a valuable auxiliary to the prosperity-producing conditions before noted. Among other things, and a paradox in California, is an annual fair without a horse-race or any kind of gambling, given



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under the auspices of the Pajaro Valley Agricultural Fair Association. This association was organized in 1887 and possesses, besides omitting the horse-racing program, these distinctive features. They receive no state appropriation; encourage the young by having a juvenile department with one-half the premiums that all other departments get, including public-school work; give evening entertainments every evening during Fair week, and each year introduce numerous novelties which contribute to the success of their efforts. But most conspicuous, and no doubt the most prominent factor in the cause of the great success of this organization, is the fact that eight of the directors are ladies."

In 1940 the Peter Petersen tract was leased and the grounds were improved by a crew of Pinto Lake CCC enrollees. The present fair grounds were used for the first time in 1941. The war stopped improvement plans for some time but continued in 1945.

Well, needless to say, the fair has changed over the years — it has grown and been improved but still remains one of those wonderful small town fairs that child and adult alike can enjoy over and over again — try it, you'll like it.

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FAIR

*Old Farm Ways
'X' Scarecrow Days*



SEPT.
8-13

Fairgrounds
Watsonville

The 1986 fair poster.