

# Hotel Resetar survived earthquake, still stands today



**Betty  
Lewis**

That was  
Watsonville

"Opening of the Hotel Resetar — To all who are interested in the onward progress of the city of Watsonville and the Pajaro Valley, the opening of the Hotel Resetar tomorrow, must indeed, be a source of pride. It is decidedly heartening to witness the faith of the Resetar brothers in this city, to know that they have faith, that so many of us lack, in its future progress and prosperity and are willing to gamble on their judgment, and spend their money here instead of hoarding it up at interest, or sending it out of the state..." — Evening Pajaronian, June 3, 1927.

Formally opened on June 4, 1927, the new Hotel Resetar, designed by William Weeks and the largest structure ever built in Watsonville at that time, rose five stories from the southwest corner of Main and West Lake. This new hostelry was the brainchild of Mike, Mitchell and Louis Resetar and it was to serve a long felt need for a larger and more commodious hotel — the Appleton on West Beach Street was not large enough to handle travelers and busi-

nessmen in any large number.

The proposed building site extended back the entire block along West Lake. The Brassel house was on the West Lake side and was moved to Marchant Street after the Resetar brothers in 1922. The new hotel boasted a beauty shop, barber shop, coffee shop, dining room plus the large "Skyroom" on the second floor (opened in 1928). The main lobby boasted a large fireplace at the west end; brown mahogany woodwork on the walls; slabs of black and gold onyx graced the registration desk and, at the windows,

hung draperies of soft, old gold with over drapes of golden velvet.

Leaded French doors led from the writing room to the outside patio with its handsome tiled fountain which was surrounded by ornamental plants — a lovely place to rest on a sunny day. Off of the West Lake entrance was a stairway that led up to the mezzanine where there was a ladies' parlor; here one could meet a friend or rest a bit after shopping. The 100 rooms each had a view of the Pajaro Valley — the hotel was dubbed a rallying place for the "Knights of the Satchel."

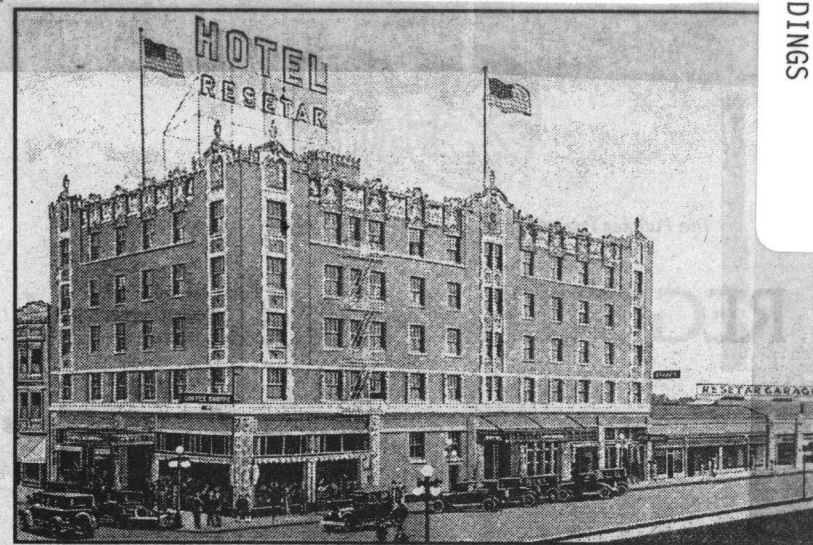


The site before the hotel was built.

The new manager was Mr. A.E. Bern, former owner of the Riviera Hotel in Santa Barbara and J.E. Harvey served as assistant manager. Other members of the staff included William Smith, night clerk; bell hops, elevator boys, a housekeeper and four maids.

In 1955, the coffee shop and bar closed for several months for remodeling under the guidance of the new owners Charles Leonard, Joe Batich and Mile Dubracich. The cost of these improvements amounted to \$30,000 and included in this amount were newly-painted murals on the coffee shop walls depicting the agricultural industry in the valley. These are long gone along with the coffee shop and dining room. In the late '70s and early '80s the coffee shop was a popular breakfast stop for Tim Arano, Pat Haley, Leonore Kelly, Ruth Turner, George Menasco, Betty Taddie, Jennie Menasco, this writer and a group of Japanese farmers who would sit in the far corner and engage in lively conversation. A lot of Watsonville history was discussed on those mornings including when the lobby was put to use during the Influenza epidemic in 1918.

Some interesting people stayed or visited the hotel such as Richard Nixon, Nancy Reagan, James Roosevelt and Kim Novak who stayed there during the filming of "Vertigo" in 1957. The hotel was



Postcard of the exterior of the hotel.

purchased by Dick Halward who sold it in 1980 to John and Gloria Estillore. MacKenzie & Smith purchased the property in 1985. HIP took over in December of 1989 and invested nearly three million dollars in the acquisition and restoration. In 1992, an opening celebration was held by HIP, Housing For Independent People, Inc., at the hotel which was attended by many in the community plus special guests. At that time, the shops on the ground floor were Resetar Barber Shop, Lydia's Children's Wear, Helen's Corner, Hair's The Place, Inner City Video and Michael's Catering.

A four-year renovation plan is in the works for this historic hotel under the guidance of HIP and the State. William Weeks would be

proud of this edifice that he designed just nine years before his death. So many buildings in Watsonville went down with the earthquake of 1989 and we are certainly glad to have the Hotel Resetar still standing and being a vital and visual part of the community.

"Scaffolding has just been erected on the front elevation of the new Resetar Hotel for the finishing work of the cement facing, and this will no doubt progress rapidly. It has been the hope of Manager Bern, of the new hotel, that its completion might be reached before the Christmas holidays, but it is a stupendous job." — Evening Pajaronian, October 8, 1926.

Betty Lewis, a local historian, is a contributing columnist to the Register-Pajaronian.