

The life of one-time Watsonville resident Fred Atkinson

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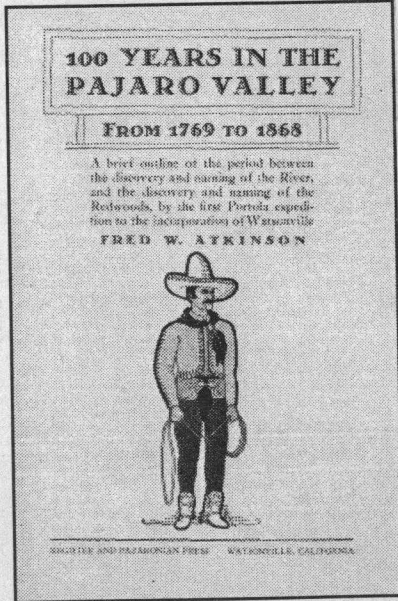


son) was instrumental in uncovering an election fraud and forced a recount which reversed the original election returns. During the recount he spent a week in which he never left the room where the ballots were kept and where the recount was underway." — Register-Pajaronian, March 5, 1968.

Mr. Atkinson sold the Benicia newspaper in 1911 at which time he and his family moved to Watsonville. In 1919 he purchased the Watsonville Register, a six-column publication, containing eight pages and employing eight people. The newspaper office was located at 452 Main St.. By 1927, eight years later, Mr. Atkinson had built the paper up to eight standard columns, running from eight to 14 pages, with a staff of 21 people. Ten carriers were delivering the Register to homes in the Pajaro Valley, and new facilities were being used as a Spanish Mission style building had been erected at 18 East Lake Ave. in 1926.

In 1930, Mr. Atkinson purchased the Evening Pajaronian and became the owner of both the daily and weekly newspapers in Watsonville. He was also very active in community affairs and was to be elected mayor of Watsonville in 1921. He served three consecutive two-year terms as mayor, at a time when a mayor and a board of aldermen governed the city. Two aldermen were elected from each of four wards.

During the six years of Atkinson's administration, the following was accomplished: a successful bond election for the purchase of the city water works from a private



Photos courtesy of Betty Lewis

A page from "100 years in the Pajaro Valley" by Fred Atkinson.

concern. The office of police chief was changed to an appointed office (formerly, it was a combination of marshal and tax collector). The tax and license-collecting department was transferred to the jurisdiction of the city clerk. A new fire house was built on Second Street, another successful bond election, carried in 1925, provided for the construction of an out-fall sewer system, and a long-term street paving program ended the city's dirt streets.

Mr. Atkinson was also the author of two books which are now collector's items — "100 Years In the Pajaro Valley" and "Argonauts of 1769."



Printing office of Watsonville Register, 1912. William McKay, Rudolph Fischer, Stephen Crosetti, two unknowns, Olin Nash.

In the first book, printed in 1934 by the Register and Pajaronian Press, his preface states: "A brief outline of the period between the discovery and naming of the river and the discovery and naming of the redwoods, by the first Portola expedition to the incorporation of Watsonville."

Less than a month before his death, in April of 1937, a project he had worked on for 10 years came into being as radio station KHUB

went on the air. He was a director for the Chamber of Commerce and a charter member of the old Watsonville Exchange Club which was re-organized into the Rotary Club. Atkinson served as president of the Rotary Club and served as president of the Watsonville Sciots and an honorary member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

He and his family lived at 240 Maple Avenue in a house designed by William Weeks in 1902 for W.A.V.

Torchiana. The late Fred Atkinson contributed much to the city of Watsonville and to the Pajaro Valley. A brilliant man, he was loved and respected by those who knew him and those who knew of him. In a relatively brief span of 61 years, he accomplished much and accomplished it well.

... Betty Lewis, a local historian, is a regular columnist for the Register-Pajaronian.