

From patrolman to chief of police

Matt Graves was born in San Luis Obispo on Sept. 3, 1895, the son of Madison Graves.

The family of father, mother, four sons — David, Alphonso, Richard and Matt — and two daughters, Elizabeth and Frances, traveled to Corralitos by covered wagon in 1904.

They brought all their possessions to land purchased by Madison, including two fruit ranches. Just

That was Watsonville

of 48 years after suffering from diabetes.

During the short time he lived in the Pajaro Valley, Madison made many friends and the following "pillars" of the community were pallbearers at his funeral: Edward White, Thomas Beck, James Duckworth, B. Parker, James Holohan and James Sheehy.

The young Matt attended local schools, and during World War I he served as a first sergeant in the Engineer Corps. Upon returning to Watsonville, Matt worked for the Spreckels Sugar Company, serving two years in Mexico where he was a foreign labor agent. He was later employed with the Garcia and Magini Company of Watsonville.

When the popular Johnny Corr resigned from the Watsonville Police Force in June of 1925, Robert Hastings was the recently appointed chief of police. At the meeting of the Aldermen soon after Corr's res-



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ignation, Chairman Weisenburger, of the police committee, recommended that James (Matt) Graves be appointed patrolman to work the night shift.

In July of 1928, Matt was promoted to sergeant. It was at this same time that the police force "blossomed" out in new uniforms of an olive green shade. One officer resigned saying that on a salary of \$140 a month a new uniform was "out of reach."

Upon the death of Police Chief Hastings in April of 1934, the following appeared in the local newspaper: "James M. 'Matt' Graves, popular police sergeant, was elevated to the position of chief of police last night when the recommendation of the police committee was unanimously adopted by the board of aldermen at its regular bi-monthly meeting at the city hall..."

The police committee of W.J.C. Ramsay and Manuel C. Silva said that Graves was by far the best choice as his record in the police department had been outstanding and he had taken on many of the chief's duties during Hastings illness. "...The new chief declares he



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will give the city the best police protection possible and asks that the citizens cooperate with him in helping maintain the same high standard of service which Watsonville has had under Chief Hastings."

In January of 1940, Matt Graves received a letter from J. Edgar Hoover, Federal Bureau of Investigation, United States Department of Justice, commending him (Graves) for "your Department being modernized in its crime detection activities as well as in its crime prevention work. You are to be complimented for your deep interest in

raising the standards of the law enforcement profession in your community and I am sure the training received in the recent Police Training School conducted at Salinas, will be of assistance to you and the men of your Organization in combating crime..."

Matt retired from the job of police chief of Watsonville in 1947 and Frank Osmer was appointed to the job. Matt suffered from diabetes as had his father and the family moved to Santa Clara where they lived until Matt died on October 1, 1959, in the Veterans Hospital in Oakland after a long illness.

He left behind his wife, Amy, who is still living in Santa Cruz, and two daughters, Mrs. Betty Stephens and Mrs. Harold Andrews. His funeral was held in Watsonville and he was buried at the Valley Catholic Cemetery. Honor guards made up of members of the Watsonville fire and police departments were at the funeral. Pallbearers were Charles and Joe Leonard, John Sambililo, M.N. Watters, Milo Cooper and Rudolph Schneickert.

Matt's grandson, police officer Timothy Stephens, provided some of the information for this column and he is very interested in locating memorabilia from his grandfather's era including badges, photos, etc. His address is: Officer Tim Stephens c/o Los Gatos Police, 110 E. Main St., Los Gatos, CA 95032

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