

First bridge over Pajaro River replaced ferry

Prior to a bridge being built over the Pajaro River at the south end of Main Street, John Hernander, more commonly known as "Dutch John," obtained a franchise for running a ferry across the river. This was in March of 1867, a year before the town of Watsonville was incorporated.

The following appeared in the local newspaper soon after: "This ferry is running at intervals, subject to the caprice of Dutch John who unfortunately obtained a franchise, but knows no more about running a ferry than he does about keeping a hotel. Through gross negligence on his part, the telegraph that had been replaced by considerable difficulty, was broken and carried away. John acts on the principle that the entire river being at his disposal, he has a right to run this boat anywhere, regardless of the rights of others. A reminder in the shape of a fine would perhaps bring him to a proper knowledge of what's what."

Nevertheless, Dutch John went on



Betty Lewis

That was Watsonville

to bigger and better things as in November of 1867 when he completed the first toll bridge across the river and it was opened to the public on Thanksgiving Day. The rates were as follows: footmen, 12 1/2 cents; buggy with one or two horses, 50 cents; each additional or lead horse, 12 1/2 cents; cattle per head, five cents; sheep, hogs or goats, each two cents. The length of the bridge was 610 feet and measured 16 feet in width.

Three weeks after the bridge's completion, the span was swept away during a flood and the loss was estimated at \$1,000 — the cost of the

construction had amounted to \$8,000. But Dutch John was undaunted and immediately built a new bridge: "This work has been his great hope for years and not withstanding the misfortune and difficulties he has passed through, he rises Phoenix-like from the ashes of his troubles and the bridge will be constructed anew in a more substantial manner than before and be ready for the public on or before the 18th day of June, 1868."

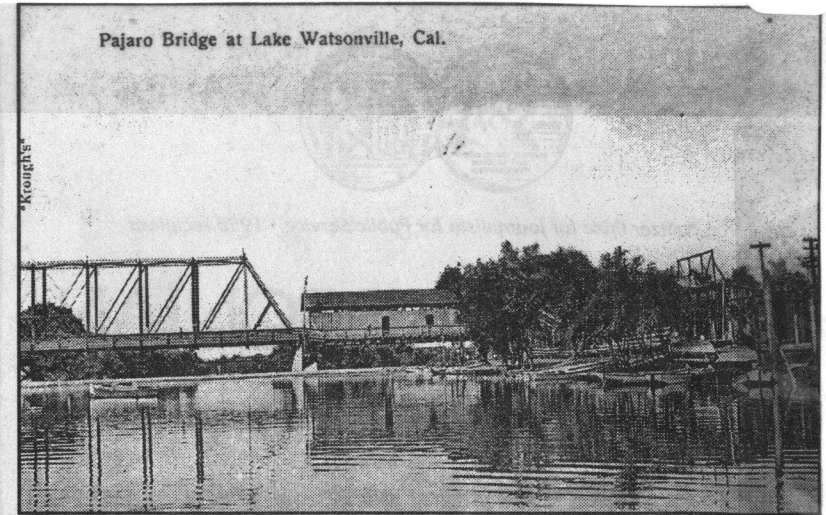
And so it was built and served for many years; the portion on the Santa Cruz County side was a covered, wooden bridge, while the Monterey County side was an open bridge with no roof. There was a pathway built at the side of the bridge to allow pedestrians to walk over the river without going through the covered part of the bridge. In 1889, the Pajaronian reported that Dutch John was visiting Watsonville from San Diego: "He was the builder of the original Pajaro Bridge and is a natural mechanic. John and his

faithful dog have registered at the Galoot Club." (This was a men's club that met at the original Cooper Building).

Just a year later the Rustler newspaper in Watsonville reported the death of Dutch John from apoplexy while at his home in San Diego. "He was quite a character in his way."

In the fall of 1904, the following appeared in the Pajaronian: "The work on Pajaro River Bridge is about completed and the structure will be soon opened to public travel. When the city of Watsonville has the funds available for the construction of a steel span at the center of the river, the bridge will be a credit to this community. However, the short wooden span that remains has been strengthened and will do good service for a long time. The city made a good investment when it expended money in putting in concrete wing walls and abutment."

This bridge served until 1915 when the covered bridge on the Santa Cruz



Pajaro Bridge at Lake Watsonville, Cal.

Picture showing an early bridge, circa 1907, when the Santa Cruz County end was covered and the Monterey County side was open.

County side was torn down and the steel frame bridge on the Monterey County side removed and parts were used in the construction of another

bridge over Malpas Creek.

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

REFERENCE

WATSONVILLE
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