

Plenty of famous folks have passed through our fair town

By BETTY LEWIS

Over the years, there have been some famous people who have come to Watsonville, such as General Tom Thumb, John Philip Sousa and Susan B. Anthony.

In September of 1880, President Rutherford B. Hayes' train stopped at the Pajaro depot for a few minutes and 500 people from Watsonville were at the station to greet the President, his wife and General Sherman.

The following is from the Pajaronian: "Mr. Hayes gracefully introduced Mrs. Hayes and General Sherman. Handshaking then commenced and those three noted visitors were kept busy and at the same time receiving and giving pleasant greetings.

"Three old soldiers, C.W. Benjamin, A.R. Alexander and J.M. Ripley, received special attention from the General. Mrs.

That was Watsonville

Hayes, by her affable and very pleasant way, her simplicity in attire and kindly words to each, captured the crowd and the children almost went wild. "At length, the train started, good-byes were said, parting cheers were given, and Jerome Downing fired a salute from the cannon and the President and his party were gone."

President Hayes was generally respected for his scholarly tastes and his honesty and dignity. He retired from public life the next year, in 1881, as he did not believe that a President should serve for more than one term. President Hayes died on Jan. 17, 1893, at the age of 70.

Josh Billings, the world-famous humorist (real name was Henry

Wheeler Shaw) came to Watsonville in October of 1885 and spoke at the Rink (Opera House) to an audience of about 300 people. His subject was the "Probabilities of Life" and admission was 50 cents. His lecture included pointed maxims, short bits of humorous natural history, and "occasional touches of refined pathos. The next day, on Oct. 14, Billings died in Monterey at the age of 67.

In June of 1891, the following appeared in the Pajaronian about another celebrity: "A number of local admirers of sport went to the Pajaro and Watsonville depots to get a glimpse of John L. Sullivan as he passed through on his way to Santa Cruz. He was so drunk that he was almost unable to change cars at Pajaro and while on his way from Pajaro to Santa Cruz he lost his silk hat while trying to pass from one car to another.

"Dan Leddy and Joe Avila (of

Watsonville) recovered the hat and sold the same to Tim Horgan for \$10. Tim says he has since been offered double that price for the hat. Only a few went over from Watsonville to see the performance of the company at Santa Cruz."

President Theodore Roosevelt stopped at the Watsonville depot for about 15 minutes in May of 1903 and about 3,000 people turned out to see this popular leader of our country. Dozens of local school children came with floral tributes and the Watsonville band played stirring patriotic tunes while the chief executive stood on the rear platform of the train and "beamed with delight."

Heading the local reception committee were W.A. Trafton, president of the city council, and E.A. Hall, president of the board of trade. Roosevelt was presented with two boxes of large strawber-

ries plus a large can of rich cream.

A portion of his address to the crowd is as follows: "My fellow citizens, I have but a minute here, and I can only express to you my appreciation of your having come out to greet me. This is a great fruit center. California is a great fruit state — but above all a Great State for Californians. And more than that, my friends, the thing that has impressed me the most in this country, in going from the Atlantic to the Pacific, is the essential oneness of the people, that fact that Americans are all Americans from Maine to California — from the Golden Gate to Sandy Hook.

"That is the important point. And glad though I am to see all your products I want to congratulate you upon one, the children. They are ahead in quality and ahead in quantity, and as I believe in your stock, I am glad it does not show any symptoms of dying out.

I do not come here to teach. I come here to learn..."

In October of 1962, Richard Nixon came to Watsonville while campaigning for governor of California against incumbent Edmund Pat Brown. About 500 people were at the old Southern Pacific Depot as he arrived by train from Santa Cruz.

Traveling from the county seat on the Nixon train were local people Mayor Fred Flodberg, Opal Marshal and Joe Chamberlain. Mrs. Ted Ludlam gave Nixon a box of apples and, according to reporter Don Wilson, Nixon grinned and said he always had liked Watsonville apples.

This is just a sampling of the illustrious who have come to the Pajaro valley — there were the usual number of senators, congressmen and movie stars along with a desperado or two!