

When the Iron Horse came to town — almost

By BETTY LEWIS
CORRESPONDENT

In the spring of 1871 rumors were circulating, as they had often done before, that a branch line of the Southern Pacific Railroad would be coming to Watsonville.

In May, ex-Gov. Leland Stanford, his brother and two other men came to the area to look over the situation and to view the tracks being laid from Gilroy to Hollister.

The Southern Pacific asked for a \$100,000 subsidy from the people of Watsonville — a very large amount to be raised by the local citizens. When the subscription reached \$8,000, a letter was received that if \$50,000 was raised, Southern Pacific would run the tracks to the Pajaro Valley and that the depot would be a mile and a half from town on the Monterey County side of the Pajaro River.

the Pajaro River in 1869, about two miles out Riverside Road, and named it the Railroad School.

In September 1871, the first load of railroad ties passed through town from the lumber regions to the north of the valley. Ford and Sanborn entered into a contract with Southern Pacific to supply 10,000 ties.

This same month, Lucius Holbrook (who later became a Watsonville judge) was building warehouses in Pajaro to house and store the local grain until it could be shipped by rail. Disappointment reigned over the failure of the spur to come to the town of Watsonville, but meanwhile hay and grain was filling up the new warehouse and Henry C. Pratt, son of Judge C.H. Pratt, was appointed freight agent out of 40 applicants for the job.

The location of the depot is not known to any outside

of the railroad people. We suppose it will be placed about two miles from town, at a point almost inaccessible during the winter season. Why it is thus we know not. The ways of the R.R. Co. are past finding out. A petition has, we believe, been presented to ex-Gov. Stanford asking him to bring the depot nearer town. No answer has been vouchsafed to the petitioners as yet. We trust the company will locate the depot just where they please, without any regard to anyone else.

—The Pajaronian
Oct. 12, 1871

The depot was built on the Monterey County side of the river at the Pajaro junction and complaints were voiced over the inadequacy of the bridge going over the Pajaro River from Watsonville to Monterey County and thus the

depot. The bridge, built in 1868, was very narrow and it was suggested that it be widened to accommodate two teams of horses and wagons on it at the same time.

When the first train came to the junction in November, an excursion was run to Sargents out Chitenden Pass way with local people overflowing the coaches, celebrating this first train ride with a picnic in the grove near Sargent's station. A hotel was built near the depot and called the Pajaro Hotel. After a succession of owners, the structure burned down in 1914 at a loss to the owners of \$3,300 — the insurance was for only \$950.

The passenger train left Pajaro Junction for San Francisco at 12:30 p.m. daily and the freight train left at noon daily.

In 1877, A. Johnson was the station agent and reported the following exports for one week in No-

vember: "44,000 feet of lumber; 20,000 lbs. of potatoes; over 2,000 boxes of apples; 9000 boxes of pears; 15,000 lbs. of wheat; 5,000 lbs. of oats; over 800 sacks of flour; miscellaneous merchandise and produce 22,000 lbs.; and 32 kegs of beer."

During the two years commencing April 1, 1880, the Watsonville Mill and Lumber Company shipped from the Pajaro depot 2,900 cars of lumber — an average of five cars per day, Sunday excluded.

In 1913, after a long struggle, the name was changed from Pajaro Junction to Watsonville Junction. The San Francisco Examiner commented: *The sweet name of Pajaro has been ground into the dust by the juggernaut of commerce. Officials of the Southern Pacific Railroad and delegates from Watsonville and Pajaro decided on this change yesterday out of consideration for the stuttering, unpoetic pronunciation which Easterners have put on the name*

with delight upon the happy school children from whose hands the floral tributes came.

—Evening Pajaronian
May 11, 1903

The 15-minute stop of the President was arranged by W.A. Trafton, president of the City Council, and E. A. Hall, president of the Board of Trade. A presentation was made to "Teddy" of two boxes of large, luscious strawberries, El Pajaro brand, and they were accompanied by a large can of rich cream.

Immediately following, and while the President was still in hearing distance, the throng joined in singing the soul-stirring air "My Country, 'Tis of Thee" and President Roosevelt stood on the rear platform with uncovered head for as long as he could hear the voices.

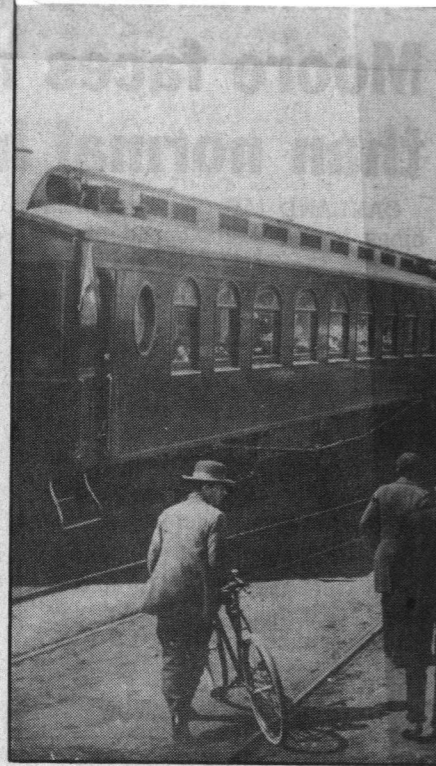
—Evening Pajaronian
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As this latter was a new phase of the railroad question, the people of Watsonville, and surrounding country on the Santa Cruz side of the river, concluded to wait before subscribing more, until the matter could be more fully understood. Large subscriptions could be raised here in case the company ran the road on this side of the river, or even half a mile from the other side, but they did not feel so much like expending their money for a road that was to run and have the depot over 1½ miles from the center of the town of Watsonville. Hence the matter, at this writing, remains in abeyance.

—The Pajaronian
June 8, 1871

By July, several hundred Chinese men were working on the railroad, laying tracks from Gilroy to the Pajaro Valley, but it was still uncertain on which side of the river the depot would be located. The school trustees were more optimistic, as they built a small school on the Watsonville side of



A crowd meets the train at the depot in Pajaro before it became known as Watsonville Junction.



Pajaro Valley Historical Association

President Theodore Roosevelt arrived at the Pajaro Depot on May 11, 1903, when nearly 3,000 people crowded around the depot.

Of the throng that greeted the chief executive were hundreds of bright school children, each of whom brought his or her floral greeting to the man grown great by his own efforts — a man who is broad mentally, morally and physically, and in whom the American people have implicit faith. As the train, drawn by two monster locomotives, one decked in the national colors and bearing a huge floral horseshoe on the pilot, came into the yard, the Watsonville City Band played an inspiring patriotic air. Flowers by the handful were thrown upon the platform of the rear car upon which President Roosevelt stood, and the kindly face of the President beamed

In 1910, the Lark, a luxurious passenger train, started carrying passengers between San Francisco and Los Angeles, stopping at Watsonville Junction on the way. In its prime, the Lark had 15 cars, coach and Pullman, with a dining car and lounge bar. Before its demise in 1968, it was down to two coaches, one Pullman and a car filled with automatic vending machines.

Soon after the Lark's demise, the Del Monte Special was removed from the run. In its heyday, the Del Monte was the *only* way to travel to the city — San Francisco. Leaving Watsonville Junction at 8:44 a.m. and returning at 7:70 in the evening, passengers could ride the streamlined, air-conditioned train for \$5.90 round trip with coffee and snacks available. The Del Monte was finally stopped when fewer and fewer people rode the train.

A new depot was built at Watsonville Junction in 1949 and a dedication dinner was held at the Hotel Resetar.