

Jennie Menasco dies at age 101

Jennie Hannaford Menasco — who came to Watsonville to visit a sister after the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 and stayed on to marry Sidney Menasco, owner of Ford's Department Store, and become active in the civic life of her adopted town — died last night at a local convalescent hospital.

Mrs. Menasco, who was 101, had been in failing health for several years.

Born in Oakland on Dec. 6, 1884, she later moved to Stockton with her family, but suffered from the effects of San Joaquin Valley heat and moved to Santa Cruz at age 12 to live with a sister.

After finishing school there, she settled in San Francisco and went to work in a bakery, living above her place of employment. She was asleep when the big earthquake hit the city early on the morning of April 18, 1906, and the jolt tumbled her out of bed. She immediately dressed and headed for the railroad station, boarding a train bound for Watsonville. She planned to stay with a sister "until the dust settled."

In 1907, she went to work at Ford's as a clerk in the dry goods department, later working in the grocery section there.

Although she knew who Sidney Menasco was from her work, she did not have a formal introduction to the son of the owner of Ford's until they met at the skating rink, which also had a dance floor, on West Lake Avenue.

The two were married in 1911 and Mrs. Menasco left Ford's to devote herself to her husband and later their two sons, Sidney and George.

The couple moved into the Spanish-style home at the corner of High Street and Freedom Boulevard in 1931. A year later, Mr. Menasco suffered a heart attack and died at age 52. The Menascos' son, Sidney, died of a staph infection in 1936, when he was 21.

After the deaths of her husband and son, Mrs. Menasco became even more active in civic affairs.

Perhaps the busiest time of her life was during World War II. Working with the Red Cross, she opened a second-hand store in the old bowling alley building on what was then Third Street (now East Beach Street). For three years, tons of donated goods were sold there and the proceeds used to help make the life of soldiers stationed at Fort Ord and other nearby military installations more pleasant.

When the store closed, the Register-Pajaronian reported that more than \$19,000 had been raised, with expenses for the entire three years kept to less than \$1,000. Mainly because of her efforts in the shop, Mrs.



JENNIE MENASCO
1969 photo

Menasco was named Woman of Year in 1945 by the Watsonville Chamber of Commerce. It was the first time the chamber had given such an award.

Mrs. Menasco credited the community for making the Red Cross store such a success.

Besides the Red Cross and her work during the war, Mrs. Menasco also belonged to the Watsonville Woman's Club, where she was one of the earliest members, the Order of Eastern Star, the Pajaro Valley Historical Association, and the Soroptimist Club. She worshipped at All Saints' Episcopal Church.

In her later years, Mrs. Menasco lived at the Resetar Hotel and was a familiar figure around downtown Watsonville, often eating lunch at Ford's sandwich shop, telling of her memories of the San Francisco earthquake and Watsonville in years gone by.

In 1978, when County Bank opened a branch at Main Street and East Beach Street, a mural was painted behind the tellers' station.

A likeness of Jennie Menasco as a young woman in a turn-of-the century style dress with leg-o'-mutton sleeves is part of the painting.

She entered the convalescent hospital in 1980.

She leaves a son, George, now president of Ford's, and his wife, Earline; two grandchildren, Sidney Menasco, of Watsonville, and Georgeann Menasco Stolich, of Aptos; five great-grandchildren, Alexis and Jennifer Menasco, both of Watsonville, and Heidi Murphy, and Robert and Don Ditlevsen, all of Aptos; and a niece, Merrill Carlton, of Watsonville.

Funeral arrangements are being made at Mehl's Colonial Chapel. The family suggests that memorial remembrances be sent to a favorite charity.