

When world-famous people visited Watsonville

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In November of 1909, when people were humming "I Wonder Who's Kissing Her Now" or maybe "By the Light of the Silvery Moon," The Pajaronian announced that the great John Philip Sousa was coming to town.

The "march king" and his band were making an extended tour of the Pacific Coast and

the manager of the Watsonville Opera House had been able to book them for one afternoon. Tickets were sold like hot cakes at the City Drug Store and, on Nov. 10th, 600 people jammed into the building known sometimes as the Opera House, sometimes as the Rink. The following is from the Evening Pajaronian:

"There is only one band in the world and that is Sousa's. The great American nation will never erase the name of Sousa from its musical mind. Today, the Opera House is too small to accommodate the crowd that packed the theatre to suffocation and then some. Orchestra pit and circle, boxes, gallery and all were packed until capacity was more than reached and even then there were crowds standing in the aisles, exits and in the entrance. All this goes to show what a popular drawing card the popular Sousa's band is!"

Sousa of course was not only the leader of, first, the U.S. Marine Band and later, his, own band, but the brilliant composer of such march tunes as "Semper Fidelis," "The Stars and Stripes Forever" and "The Washington Post March." Sousa and his band frequently toured the United States and Canada, as well as other parts of the world. The small town of Watsonville, population around 5,000 in 1909, was indeed fortunate to hear the great and stirring music provided by Sousa and his band. Jim Piratsky, editor of the Evening Pajaron-

ian, wrote:

"To say that the program this afternoon was magnificently rendered sounds weak when one speaks of Sousa's band. No leader in this small world of ours can draw such power and beauty from a band of musicians as can the incomparable Sousa."

Long before Sousa's appearance, Watsonville had another

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famous visitor. The following is from the Pajaronian of June 21, 1877:

"All the dead walls around town are pasted over with large colored posters of General Tom Thumb and party. The general and party will be here on Friday afternoon and evening, the 29th instant. The party embraces Tom Thumb and wife, Minnie Warren and Major Newell. They are the only troupe of small people traveling, and as their reputation is long and firmly established, we expect to see full houses on that day. We have seen Tom Thumb and party, and can assure our citizens that it is an interesting entertainment, and one well worth seeing. Admission 75 cents for reserved seats and 50 and 25 for regular seats."

"General" Tom Thumb was one of the creations of the great showman P.T. Barnum. The "general" was born Charles Sherwood Stratton in 1838. He had grown to only 25 inches in height by the time he was 4, which is when Barnum visited the Stratton home and decided there was a show-business future for the little fellow. It was Barnum who gave the

comic acts and laughable sketches. Ladies and children are considerably advised to attend the day exhibition and thus avoid the crowd and confusion of the evening performance."

People flocked to Main Street to see the parade prior to the show and saw the tiny coach and ponies presented to the Thumbs by Queen Victoria of England. The two performances were packed to the rafters at the Opera House, as local residents wanted a closer look at the midgets. While in Watsonville, the troupe stayed at the Mansion House Hotel, which was just a few steps from the Opera House. Tom Thumb was quite a billiard player and took on some of the local boys and beat them!

Tom Thumb died just six years after visiting Watsonville. Mrs. General Tom Thumb, as she was called, returned to Watsonville in 1892 as the wife of an Italian dwarf, County Primo Magri, who stood 38 inches in height. Lavinia Thumb Magri died in 1919 at the age of 78 and was buried beside her first husband, Tom Thumb, in a child's casket. The following is from the book "Barnum Presents General Tom Thumb" by Alice Desmond:

"An exact copy of his tiny self in his days of glory, General Tom Thumb stands frozen in stone on his own monument. He never takes his eyes away from a large square of granite,

with 'Barnum' cut in heavy letters across the base. Barnum joined his 'little but sympathizing friend' behind iron gates and under the stately oaks of Mountain Grove Cemetery in Bridgeport, Connecticut. America's best-loved showman is buried across the road from the midget, he made famous and with whom he was associated most of his life."



Mrs. Tom Thumb



General Tom Thumb