



Pajaro Valley Historical Association

Submarine F-1 was perched high on the sand at Port Watsonville in October, 1912.

Port Watsonville proved deadly

DESPITE being on an ankle-deep river several miles from the bay, Watsonville always wanted to have its own seaport. Early efforts to ship goods out through Elkhorn Slough were moderately successful, and every now and then someone (usually from out of town) would get the urge to build a wharf off what is now called Palm Beach.

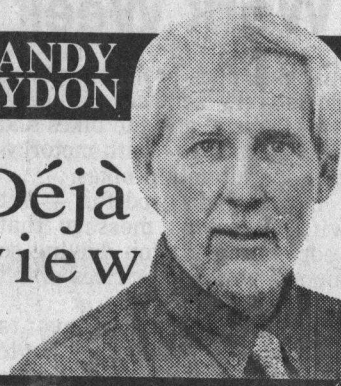
Unfortunately, the ocean eats wharves at that location: A 1,300-foot wharf built there in 1903 was demolished within a year.

Hope springs eternal, however, and in 1912 a 1,700-foot wharf was built into the ocean at the same location and was named Port Watsonville. We probably should call it the "alleged" Port Watsonville.

It was to this Port Watsonville that the submarines F-1 and F-2 were invited during the Apple Annual of October, 1912. A heavy sea on the night of Oct. 10 broke F-1's mooring lines and swept the submarine up on the beach. During the confusion two sailors fell overboard and drowned. And there sat the submarine, mute testimony to

**SANDY
LYDON**

**Déjà
view**



the fact that saying there is a port there does not make it so.

During the following week a very embarrassed U.S. Navy brought tugboats and warships of various sizes to try and pull the submarine back out to sea. Sailors and citizens alike pulled in vain to rock the submarine off the sandbar. Finally, after a week of this, a battleship and two tugs succeeded in getting the F-1 afloat. The bedraggled submarine was towed back to Mare Island where an inspection found that only \$2,000 worth of damage had been done to the

sub.

Port Watsonville was not so lucky. Later that winter the ocean took several large bites out of the wharf, rendering it unsafe for shipping. By 1917 the final snaggle-toothed remains of the wharf were destroyed.

Sometimes during very low winter tides you can go out to the north end of the Shorebird condominiums and see the wharf stubs sticking out of the sand, monuments to Watsonville's efforts to put a port where there wasn't one.

Go ahead and dream the impossible dream, but think twice before acting on it.

If you have a photograph you would like to see used in this column, or one that you would like some help identifying, send a good photocopy (color copies are best) to Déjà View, Sandy Lydon, care of the Santa Cruz County Sentinel, 207 Church St., Santa Cruz, Calif. 95060. E-mail address: sallydon@aol.com.

Sandy Lydon is a member of the history faculty at Cabrillo College.