

'Watsonville did herself proud' during flood of 1955

"The rising Pajaro River will reach a crisis between 7 and 8 p.m. it appeared Friday afternoon. A high tide at 5 p.m., combined with flood waters from San Benito county, will put Watsonville's levee system to the severest test. If it will quit raining, police chief Frank Osmer said, we might make it." — Register Pajaronian, December 23, 1955.

For awhile, Watsonville was partially isolated from the nearby areas as slides on Hecker Pass and Chittenden closed the roads. A concrete bridge in Corralitos washed out as the area received 5.30 inches of rain in 24 hours. A death victim was J.C. Garcia, 57, section worker for the railroad. He fell into the raging Pajaro River when working on the tracks in Chittenden pass. Two homes were washed away — one on



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Lakeview road and the other on Corralitos Creek.

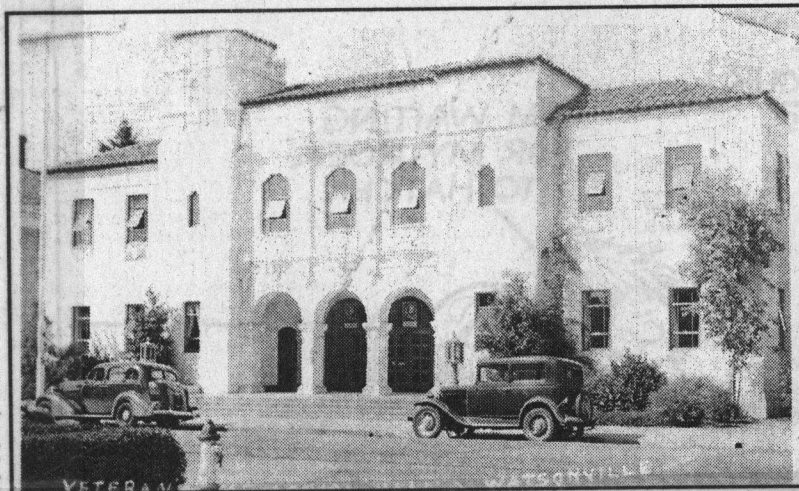
There were breaks in the Salpuedes Creek levee with water flooding many acres as the worst rain fall in fifteen years poured down on the Pajaro Valley and the rest of the state. The mayor of Watsonville, Dr. W.J.C. Ramsay, declared a state of emergency and families were evacuated in various parts of town. The Veteran's Hall

That was Watsonville

was used as an evacuation headquarters as well as temporary living quarters for 34 soldiers from Ford Ord. The Pajaro River reached a height of 33.2 feet.

Another death credited to the flood was that of Amato Rodriguez, who was evacuated from his home on Lakeview Road and later died at Watsonville hospital due to pneumonia. Hardest hit throughout the state was Yuba City, as this town was flooded twice in one week sending thousands of people fleeing for their lives. Governor Goodwin Knight came to Watsonville on Dec. 28 to inspect the local flood damage and commented, after his tour: "It's apparent that only a great community effort at the broken levee saved Watsonville from major disaster."

Naturally, there have been floods since then and Pajaro, over in Monterey County, comes immediately to mind but many of us remember the 1955 flood and the then editor of the Register Pajaronian, Frank Orr, had this to say in his editorial: "The measure of a community, like the measure of a man, is often the quality of its response to an emergency. Watsonville did herself proud let it be recorded, during the harrowing hours of last week-end flood emergency. To name names would be an endless job; in-



The Veteran's Hall, which served as the evacuation center and where Fort Ord soldiers were stationed to help with the flood.



Flood scene in front of the Pajaro Valley Bank, 1911. Left to right, F. S. Wilson, W. N. Cumming, J. J. Morey, L. H. Lopes, J. H. Covell. Present location of Wells Fargo.

Not the 1955 flood, but one that hit Watsonville in 1911.

deed, some of the volunteers who worked the hardest didn't have their names recorded anywhere. But there are a few examples. The Watsonville police department was magnificent; its chief took over and retained command for well over 50 hours without sleep. That goes for the fire department, too, and for the men of our fine local National Guard company. The countless unofficial civilian volunteers, the

women who moved in with their accustomed competence, the members of veteran's groups and other civic groups. We'd like to give forth with a special cheer for a hardworking, competent group of men, the staff of KHUB, now KOMY. In hour-to-hour crisis, radio comes into its finest opportunity for public service, and in several floods we've never seen the job of instantaneous public information done so well as

that stubby faced crew did all through the dreary hours of the emergency."

In talking to Frank Osmer recently he said that the police department was short on cars with radios and that Resetar Brothers came forward and lent them what was needed. He also told of all the hip boots being sold out that first day at Earl's Men's Shop. Let's hope that floods of any type or size are all in the past.