

Mansion House, Lettunich building have gone through changes

Once hailed as the most elegant hotel south of San Francisco, the Mansion House in Watsonville, built in 1871, by 1910 was past its prime. Owners Mateo and M. N. Lettunich were Watsonville orchardists who also operated the Pajaro Valley's largest fruit packing business including three modern fruit packing houses. These local capitalists decided in September of 1910 to move the old hotel; build a new one in its place and combine the two building into a 101 room hostelry.

On March 18, 1911, Mateo Lettunich appeared before the Board of Aldermen seeking a permit to move the Mansion House and was granted approval. By now it had been decided that the new structure would contain seventy-five rooms with twenty-seven baths and the old hotel would accommodate all the employees of the "new" Mansion House.

Architect William Weeks had been hired to prepare plans for the new four-story structure. He had just finished the Apple Annual building and was nearing completion of the Hotel Appleton (Wall Street Inn) and the Y.M.C.A. building in the 500 block of Main Street. Again plans were changed and the Lettuniches decided to build a business block.

In May of 1912 an auction was held for all items in the Mansion House stables in back of the hotel. By the fall of 1913, the Mansion House dining room was closed and



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**That was
Watsonville**

all tenants on the hotel's property were given notice to vacate. Work began on tearing down the stables and other out-buildings. The redwood timber in these buildings, brought down from Corralitos in 1871, was in a "remarkable state of preservation" as was the lumber in the old hotel.

Dan Gillham of San Jose had been hired to move the structure north on Main Street and he stated in December of 1913 that he would complete the moving job in about six weeks. Contractor James Patterson, also of San Jose, came on the job in April of 1914 to build what was now called the Lettunich Block. Mr. Patterson was known for his recent work in the Garden City on the Vendome Hotel and the First National Bank.

Then called a "skyscraper" the tall structure was built of steel and reinforced concrete, with a frontage of 122 feet on the Main Street side and 112 feet on East Beach Street. Five stores were provided in the front of the building and two stores facing the plaza. There were twenty-seven offices on the three upper floors which were reached by an electric elevator. Built in a record six months and finished in October of 1914, the new Lettunich building boasted of electricity throughout, janitor with vacuum cleaner service, the celebrated Cutter Patent Mail Chute, compressed air for physicians and dentists, steam heat and water throughout.

The exterior of the building, of concrete and enameled terra cotta, featured an ornament over the main entrance made of fruits of the Pajaro Valley with the apple predominating. Built at a cost of \$100,000, the building of the Lettunich Block involved a number of local concerns: Granite Rock Company, Pajaro Valley Mercantile Company, Freiermuth Company and the High-Hammond lumber company. The Freiermuth Company did the cornices, sheet iron work, ventilators and skylights. It was said that the company had the largest cornice department of any hardware store between San Francisco and Los Angeles. Electric lights were installed between the medallions or brackets along the top of the building as well as down the corner cornices.

McSherry & Hudson were in charge of leasing the offices and some of the tenants moving into the new building were: Drs. H. B. and P. K. Watters, Dr. W. E. Lyons, Dr. G. S. Easterday, Dr. H. B. Rodgers, Attorneys James A. Hall, Sans & Hudson and C. W. Seever; Raphel & Murphy,



In this undated postcard, the Lettunich Building is on the right with Ford's on the left.

fruit growers and, on the ground floor, Daly Brothers dry goods store; Hansen drugs at 408; Calkins Confectioners at 410 and Keig Shoes at number 412. Around the corner, on East Beach at 9 was milliner Louise Hansen.

Banking had its beginnings in the building with the Fruit Growers National Bank at 404 Main in 1919. Fruit Growers sold to Liberty Bank in 1927

and that in turn became the Bank of Italy, when Bank of Italy moved there from 345 Main in 1928. A year later the Bank of Italy expanded into 400 Main and Daly Brothers moved to 345 Main street. Bank of Italy later became the Bank of America and 400 Main was thus occupied until 1969 when Bank of America relocated to their new building at Main and Fifth.

The Lettunich Building has seen

tenants come and go over the years, including County Bank, some small shops and a restaurant and now a Hispanic music store in the front corner of the building. The building remains a central part of down town Watsonville and has had a long and interesting career.

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